

POPULAR PATRISTICS SERIES



Headings on Spiritual Knowledge

(The Second Part, Chapters 1-3)

Saint Isaac of Nineveh

ISAAC OF NINEVEH

Headings on Spiritual Knowledge

(The Second Part, Chapters 1–3)

ST VLADIMIR'S SEMINARY PRESS
Popular Patristics Series
Number 63

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ISAAC OF NINEVEH

Headings on Spiritual Knowledge

(The Second Part, Chapters 1–3)

Introduction, Translation, and Notes by

SEBASTIAN BROCK

ST VLADIMIR'S SEMINARY PRESS

YONKERS, NEW YORK

2022

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Isaac, Bishop of Nineveh, active 7th century, author. | Brock, Sebastian P., translator.

Title: Headings on spiritual knowledge : (the second part, chapters 1-3) / Isaac of Nineveh ; introduction, translation, and notes by Sebastian Brock.

Other titles: Ascetical homilies. Palguta 2. English

Description: Yonkers, New York : St Vladimir's Seminary Press, [2022] | Series:

Popular patristics series, 1555-5755 ; number 63 | Includes bibliographical references and indexes. | Summary: "Appearing for the first time in English, this volume contains a translation of the Kephalaia Gnostika, the first three chapters of the recently-discovered 'Second Part' of the corpus of St Isaac of Nineveh (or 'the Syrian'). This text touches upon many aspects of the 'life of stillness,' that is, the spiritual life of hermits who would later be called hesychasts, and the author explores and explains the various levels and forms of prayer and spiritual experience from his own experience"—Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021060623 (print) | LCCN 2021060624 (ebook) | ISBN

9780881417029 (paper) | ISBN 9780881417036 (electronic)

Subjects: LCSH: Asceticism—Early works to 1800. | Spiritual life—Christianity—Early works to 1800. | Sermons, Medieval.

Classification: LCC BR65.I653 A832 2022 (print) | LCC BR65.I653 (ebook) | DDC 248.4/7—dc23/eng/20220201

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021060623>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021060624>



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ST VLADIMIR'S SEMINARY PRESS

575 Scarsdale Road, Yonkers, NY 10707

1-800-204-2665

www.svspress.com

ISBN 978-088141-702-9 (paper)

ISBN 978-088141-703-6 (electronic)

ISSN 1555-5755

Numbering of the Psalms

Septuagint	Masoretic Text	Septuagint	Masoretic Text
1-8	1-8	115	116.10-19
9	9-10	116-145	117-146
10-112	11-113	146	147.1-11
113	114-115	147	147.12-20
114	116.1-9	148-150	148-150

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

In memory of Mary Hansbury (1942–2021)

*The serpent is slain, the Accursed One is crushed,
broken is the sword of the guardian cherub:
O daughter of Light, come and enter into Paradise.*

St Jacob of Serugh (d. 521)

Acknowledgements

I am most grateful to the Reverend Professor Bogdan Bucur, Series Editor, for his initial suggestion that I translate St Isaac's *Headings on Spiritual Knowledge* for the Popular Patristics Series of St Vladimir's Seminary Press. I also take the opportunity to warmly thank the Reverend Fr Ignatius Green, Associate Editor, and the Reverend Fr Benedict Churchill, together with the Reverend Hieromonk Macarius (Ruegemer), for their careful reading of the text, which resulted in the removal of many imperfections.

Contents

INTRODUCTION

Isaac's Life and Times	9
Isaac's Works	10
The Editing of the "Second Part"	12
Contents of Chapters 1–3 of the Second Part	12
Kephalaia 1 (K1)	14
Kephalaia 2 (K2)	16
Kephalaia 3 (K3)	17
Kephalaia 4 (K4)	19
Authorities Cited by Isaac	20
The Manuscript Tradition of Isaac's Kephalaia	22
The Present Translation	23
Textual Notes	26

TRANSLATION

Chapter 1	31
Chapter 2	63
Chapter 3	67
Kephalaia 1	67
Kephalaia 2	97
Kephalaia 3	139
Kephalaia 4	177

APPENDIX

Concordance to the Different Chapter Numberings for the "First Part"	225
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SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Isaac of Nineveh, Editions and Translations	229
(a) The First Part	229
(b) The Second Part	230
(c) The Third Part/Third Collection	232
(d) Further "Parts" / "Collections"	232
2. Select Secondary Literature	232

INDEXES

Biblical References	241
Patristic Authors Cited	242
Subject Index	243

Introduction

Isaac's Life and Times

The very little that is known about Isaac's life derives from two short notices,¹ from which the following basic information can be extracted: he originated from Beth Qatraye—that is to say, the Gulf region (the term covers the whole of the west coast of the Gulf, not only the modern Qatar); he was consecrated bishop of Nineveh (Mosul) by Patriarch Gewargis, but retired after five months to live the life of a solitary, ending up attached to the monastery of Rabban Shabur located somewhere in the vicinity of Shushtar in western Iran. In his old age he is said to have gone blind.

The mention of Patriarch Gewargis provides the sole chronological anchor, since it is known that Gewargis visited Beth Qatraye in 676, and it is likely that it will have been on this visit that he selected Isaac to become bishop of Nineveh. Thus Isaac's adult life is firmly located in the latter half of the seventh century, whereas prior to the publication of the two biographical notices he had been dated to the sixth century. This late seventh-century dating for Isaac thus makes him roughly contemporary with Bede in the Latin West and Maximus the Confessor in the Greek East; more importantly, it associates him with a number of other Syriac authors of the seventh century who also originated from Beth Qatraye, such as Gabriel, author of an important commentary on the liturgical offices,² and Dadisho,

¹For further details, see Sebastian P. Brock, "Isaac the Syrian" in *La théologie byzantine et sa tradition*, vol. 1, ed. Carmelo Giuseppe Conticello (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 326–72.

²See A. Neroth van Vogelpoel, *The Commentary of Gabriel of Qatar on the East Syriac Morning Service on Ordinary Days*, Texts from Christian Late Antiquity 53 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2018).

the learned commentator on the *Asceticon* of Abba Isaias and on the *Paradise of the Fathers* (a collected edition of Egyptian monastic writings put together by “Ananisho” earlier in the seventh century).³ Dadisho’, who is also the author of a number of monastic writings,⁴ ended up associated with the Monastery of Rabban Shabur. Besides Isaac and Dadisho’ this monastery produced a third important monastic author, Simeon “of the Book of Grace,”⁵ belonging to much the same time.

Isaac’s Works

Isaac’s reputation as a profound writer on monastic spirituality has almost entirely been based on the Syriac collection of 82 of his homilies⁶ and the Greek translation of 68 of these made in the early ninth century in the Palestinian Monastery of Mar Saba,⁷ and the subsequent translations of these into many different languages.⁸ That a

³English translation by E. A. W. Budge, *The Paradise of the Fathers*, 2 vols (London: Chatto & Windus, 1907); his earlier edition of 1904 also contains the Syriac text.

⁴There is an English translation of two of his works “On Solitude” in A. Mingana, “Early Christian Mystics,” Woodbrooke Studies 7 (1934): 76–113; the Commentary on Abba Isaias’ *Asceticon* was published, with French translation, by René Draguet in the *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 326–27 (1972); an edition of the *Paradise of the Fathers* is currently being undertaken by David Phillips. For the monastery of Rabban Shabur, see Florence Jullien, “Rabban Shapur, un monastère au rayonnement exceptionnel,” *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 72 (2006): 333–48.

⁵His *Discourse on the Solitary Life* has been recently translated: Shem’ôn the Graceful, *Discourse on the Solitary Life*, trans. Mary Hansbury, Fairacres Publications 184 (Oxford: SLG Press, 2020); some other works are in Mingana, “Early Christian Mystics,” 1–69.

⁶*Mar Isaacs Ninivita, de perfectione religiosa*, ed. P. Bedjan (Paris/Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1909).

⁷Now excellently edited by M. Pirard, *Abba Isaak tou Syrou: Logoi Askētikoi*, critical edition (Holy Mountain: Sacred Monastery of Iveron, 2012); the several earlier editions, which all go back to that by Nikephoros Theotokis (1770), have a different ordering of chapters (see the Appendix for a concordance to the various editions and modern translations). The Greek translation includes five texts not by Isaac, four of which are by John of Dalyatha (8th c.), and one (the Epistle to Symeon) by Philoxenos of Mabbug (d. 523).

⁸For a brief overview, see Sebastian P. Brock, “From Qatar to Tokyo, by Way of Mar Saba: The Translations of Isaac of Beth Qatraye,” *Aram* 11–12 (1999–2000):

second collection of homilies existed was indicated by Paul Bedjan in the introduction of his edition of the Syriac text (1909); there he tells of a manuscript in Urmi (NW Iran) that contained “de fort belles pages.” The manuscript was presumed to be a victim of the massacres and destruction in Urmi in 1918. Fortunately, however, it turned out that another manuscript of this “Second Part” had been sold to the Bodleian Library in 1898 by the Rev. Yaroo Neesan, a member of the staff of the Archbishop of Canterbury’s Assyrian Mission,⁹ but it was only in 1983 that this manuscript, which had remained uncatalogued, was identified as containing the “lost” Second Part. At much the same time it emerged that a manuscript in the collection of the late Chaldean bishop in Tehran, Mar Iohannan Issayi, contained a copy of the Oxford manuscript that had been made in 1895, before the manuscript left Urmi only a few years later.

The “Second Part” contains 41 chapters, of which Chapter 3 consists of four sets of *Kephalaia*, or Headings, on (spiritual) knowledge, each with 100 numbered sections, an exception being provided by the second set, which has 105 sections. Chapter 3 (the *Kephalaia*) in fact takes up roughly one half of the entire work. Of the other chapters, 16 and 17 are duplicates of Discourses 54 and 55 of the “First Part.”

Another modern manuscript from Mar Iohannan Issayi’s collection turned out to have yet another collection of discourses attributed to Isaac. Some of the texts proved to be discourses from the “First” and “Second Part,” while one discourse, surprisingly in

475–84. Fragments of a Sogdian translation of some of the *Kephalaia Gnostica* have recently been identified; see Adrian Pirtea, “Isaac of Nineveh, Gnostic Chapters,” in Nicholas Sims-Williams, *From Liturgy to Pharmacology: Christian Sogdian Texts from the Turfan Collection*, Berliner Turfantexte 45 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019), 117–44 (K4.39 mid to 46 beginning; parts of ch. 1.84–85, K1.16, 19); other excerpts from both Part 1 and Part 2 (chapter 1.42–53a, ch. 14.24–26) are edited in Nicholas Sims-Williams, *An Ascetic Miscellany: The Christian Sogdian Manuscript E28* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 19–43.

⁹For information on him, see J. F. Coakley, “Yaroo M. Neesan: A Missionary to His Own People,” *Aram* 5 (1993): 87–100. A copy of the manuscript was made before it left Urmi (see below).

verse, is also transmitted under the name of Ephrem (in fact neither Ephrem nor Isaac is likely to be the real author). Apart from the text in verse, it seems likely that the other discourses in this “Third Part,” or “Third Collection,”¹⁰ are indeed by Isaac (3, chapters 14 and 15 are in fact duplicates with Discourses 22 and 40 of the First Part, while 3, chapter 17 is a duplicate with Chapter 25 of the Second Part). Much more problematic are the smaller other “Parts” or “Collections” that have come to light.¹¹

The Editing of the “Second Part”

The edition of the *Kephalaia* was assigned to Paolo Bettolo, who very soon produced an Italian translation, though his edition of the Syriac text has not yet appeared. The only part of the Syriac text of Chapters 1–3 so far available is that of Chapter 1.84–85, K1.16, 19 and K4.39–46; this was provided by Adrian Pirtea to accompany his edition of the newly identified Sogdian fragments.¹² The remaining chapters, 4–41 of the Second Part were published, with an accompanying English translation, in 1995.¹³ For the various subsequent translations of the “Second Part,” or “Second Collection,” into different modern languages, see below, under Select Bibliography.

Contents of Chapters 1–3 of the Second Part

The long first chapter is addressed to an otherwise unknown Ishoʿzkhā, and gives something of an overview of topics that will be covered in later chapters. Following a short second chapter come the

¹⁰This has now been edited, with an Italian translation, by Sabino Chialà, *Isacco di Ninive, Terza collezione*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 637–38 (Leuven: Peeters, 2011). For English and other translations, see the Bibliography.

¹¹See the Bibliography.

¹²Pirtea, “Isaac of Nineveh, Gnostic Chapters,” in *From Liturgy to Pharmacology*, 141–44.

¹³Sebastian P. Brock, *Isaac of Nineveh (Isaac the Syrian): ‘The Second Part,’ Chapters IV–XLI*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 554 [text], 555 [translation] (Leuven: Peeters, 1995).

four sets of *Kephalaia*, or Headings, on spiritual knowledge, which constitute the third chapter, by far the longest in the Second Part.

In contrast to Chapter 1, where there is a clear progression in the topics covered, the contents of the four sets of *Kephalaia* (designated below as K1–K4) do not seem to observe any obvious sequence, except for some cases where several sections clearly go together. A possible explanation for this situation may be found in K1.41, which suggests that the individual sections were originally intended as elucidations to his writings, “written above the lines in various places.” No traces of these supralinear references (a counterpart of modern footnotes), however, are to be found in the extant manuscripts. It is, however, certainly the case that quite a number of *Kephalaia* do deal with topics discussed elsewhere in his writings; a clear example of this is the discussion of the three “summits” (*aqme*, from Greek *akmai*) of the spiritual life in K2.49, 75, and especially K4.42, 44–47, 72, 92–93, a topic covered in Chapters 7.2 and 22.2–4, 6, further on in the Second Part (cf. Part 1, p. 48 of the Syriac text). If the *Kephalaia* did indeed start out as glosses on other passages in Isaac’s work, it is ironic that they themselves were provided here and there with glosses, or “elucidations” (*nuhhare*). These for the most part are incorporated into the text of the manuscript, and are only occasionally relegated to the margin. Their secondary nature is indicated by the fact that in the other manuscripts they sometimes appear in a slightly different place.

For the long Chapter 1 I have provided some subject headings in square brackets, but in view of the apparent absence of any overall thematic ordering in the *Kephalaia*, this practice has not been feasible for them; instead, the following outline indicating the basic topics covered in the four Centuries may prove helpful. Specific topics can also be followed up by consulting the index. Though I have indicated main parallels within the *Kephalaia* themselves, I have not attempted to do so for the First Part, or for the other chapters of the Second Part; nor have I attempted to provide any sort of commentary, though this of course remains very much a *desideratum*.

KEPHALAIA 1 (K1)

- 1-2 The hidden purpose of God's creation is so that angels and human beings should become inheritors of his Glory in the age to come.
- 3-9 Different levels of description; different states of awareness; different states
- 10 The final state
- 11-12, 17 The three levels of relationship to God, King/Judge (Old Testament), Master of the household (Gospels), and Father (through baptism), and how experienced:
- 17 Examples (of the above) from the Old Testament
- 13 Different kinds of light (cf. K3.4-5, 40)
- 14-16 Communicating truth to others
- 18-19 Lament over our lack of awareness
- 20 Length of time in prayer is not wasted; likewise with psalmody
- 21-22 Christ's role as priest for all eternity
- 23, 31 Dangers of eating too much
- 24 The reward of a well-spent vigil
- 25-27 Two kinds of knowledge, each with a different source (cf. K1.56, K3.47-9 and K4.40-41)
- 28-29 Contemplation and distraction
- 30-31 Battling with Satan
- 32 A definition of purity
- 33 A definition of impassibility (cf. K3.41)
- 34 A prayer to be used day and night
- 35 Blessed is the person who is aware of God's hidden intention
- 36 Different types of ministry (*pulhana*)
- 37-40 The spiritual mode of life (*dubbara ruhana*)
- 41 Instructions to the reader
- 42 Prayer and listlessness
- 43 An analogy using the image of a mirror

- 44 A pledge of the Kingdom to come
- 45 The dangers of ease (cf. K2.79)
- 46–48 Brief aspects of the solitary life
- 49 Significance of the two titles of Christ, First-Born and Only-Begotten (cf. K2.65–6)
- 50–51 Application of some biblical passages
- 52 The noetic cloud
- 53 The true penitent
- 54–55 The aim and practice of psalmody
- 56–58 Two kinds of knowledge, *praxis* and *theoria* (cf. K1.25–6)
- 59 Two kinds of prayer
- 60–61 The relationship of the mind to the senses
- 62 Contemplation of the world to come
- 63 Abandoning pure prayer prematurely
- 64 A definition of faith
- 65–67 Various pieces of practical advice
- 68 The different sources of spiritual meaning
- 69–72 On ascetic labors
- 73 Dealing with the devil
- 74–78 Various short definitions
- 79 The move from fear to love
- 80 The stirring of hope
- 81 A short prayer
- 82 Weeping; the example of Arsenius
- 83 Two stages on the spiritual path
- 84 A prayer
- 85–90 The process of dying—to the body, to the soul, and to the spirit; with interspersed prayers (86, 88, 90; cf. K2.37)
- 91–92 Union with God
- 93–95 Different kinds of sacrifice (cf. K3.16)
- 96–97 Knowledge in prayer
- 98–100 Different kinds of words in prayer, and the imprint left by them (cf. 2.2)

KEPHALAIA 2 (K2)

- 1 Analogy of changes in the weather
- 2 On the imprints left by words (cf. K1.98–100)
- 3 The two states, present and future
- 4–7 The utterances of God at Creation
- 8 The different objects of contemplation: Old Testament—
bodies; New Testament—the body of Christ, and hope of the
New World
- 9 The great expectation for the human race
- 10–16 On how the reception of light depends on the capacity of
the receiver; on times of illumination preceded by times of
darkness
- 17–19 Hope in what is to come; its nature
- 20–29 On anger and other passions: their workings, and how to
deal with them.
- 23 On humility (cf. K2.34 below)
- 30 A prayer
- 31–33 Solitude and its benefits
- 34 On humility (cf. K2.23 above)
- 35 On interior stillness
- 36 Truth is imageless
- 37 Deadness to the world (cf. K1.85–90)
- 38 On compassion
- 39 Against fault-finders
- 40–44 On the solitary life: the aim is not to seek after virtue, but
to become dead to virtue (43); and on different kinds of
“labor”
- 45–50 On dealing with spiritual darkness
- 51–58 On sanctification and the activity of the Holy Spirit (cf.
K3.23–24), with a digression (56), stressing that novices
should keep strictly to the specified quantities of psalmody
- 59–64 On imageless prayer as the aim; opponents of the idea; and
the effects of a “divine power” accorded by grace

- 65–66 The title “First-Born” (cf. K1.49)
- 67–8 On “the image”
- 69–72 On angels; how they experience only growth and ascent
- 73–78 Spiritual revelation; different forms of discernment and experience
- 79 The dangers of ease (cf. K1.45)
- 80–83 Practical advice on going to bed, etc.
- 84 A topic for meditation
- 85–105 Further advice, both practical and general

ΚΕΦΑΛΑΙΑ 3 (K3)

- 1, 3, 6 Appellations of God and of rational beings (cf. K4.3–6)
- 4–5 On light (cf. K1.13, and K3.40 below)
- 7–8 On virtue (*myattruta*, also “excellence”)
- 9–10 Different forms of contemplation
- 11–14 Different kinds of prayer
- 15 Need for wariness over the senses and thoughts
- 16 On the term “sacrificial victim” (cf. K1.93–5)
- 17, 19 The need for divine assistance
- 18, 20 The need for humility in order for grace to approach
- 21–22 Angels as the “first-born” in heaven; on whether or not they are “undeviating”
- 23–24 On sanctity (cf. K2.51)
- 25–26 On how Satan fights against the saints by means of women
- 27–29, 31–3 On hope and despair
- 30 A taste of the Kingdom
- 33–34 Physical weakness is not an obstacle to the life of solitude
- 35–36 The righteous and the virtuous
- 37 On tears
- 38 On stillness experienced during the office
- 39–40 On the inheritance of light
- 41 On impassibility (cf. K1.33)
- 42–46 On pure prayer

- 47-49 On two kinds of knowledge (cf. K1.25-6, 56-8); contemplation of angels (47-48)
- 50 Prayer unaccompanied by "beautiful actions" is like an eagle with plucked wings
- 51 The difference between a pure and a spiritual mentality
- 52-54 The difference between virtue in body and mind
- 55-60 Different kinds of revelations
- 61 The soul of a solitary compared to a spring of water: clear or muddied?
- 62-64 Purity of heart does not have to be attained before spiritual benefit is perceived; the example of the Israelites entering the Promised Land: this did not take place all at once (64)
- 65-67 The passions are sweet but their fruit is bitter
- 68-69 The education provided by God in this world will be exchanged for something else in the New World
- 70-75 What God has in mind, the true nature of which is concealed from us: pointers to its astonishing nature
- 74-75 Therefore do not be grieved by death and corruption
- 76-78 The five faculties of the soul, and which ones remain at death
- 79-81 On angels; after the coming of Christ angels acquire new knowledge
- 82-83 What will come about
- 84-85 During prayer is the most suitable time for revelations
- 86 A warning to a solitary who reaches great heights but despises psalmody
- 87 The fall of the Morning Star (Is 14.12; Lk 10.18)
- 88 How the thought of evil had its beginning in the desire of freedom
- 89 What being subject to Christ means
- 90-92 The role of angels; their revelations, and how they make us temples of the Holy Spirit
- 93-100 The importance of the will behind actions, and of intention

KEPHALAIA 4 (K4)

This Century very largely consists of guidance for, and in, life as a solitary, indicating both its difficulties and its rewards.

- 1-2 The progress from repentance to purity to luminosity
- 3-6 Terms used of God; the difference between *El Shaddai* and *Ehyeh asher ehyeh* (cf. K3.1, 3, 6)
- 7-11 Aspects of the perfection of the intellect, and progress towards it
- 12-19 On the spiritual mode of being, and some misconceptions
- 20-24, 26 Various "virtuous acts" that are subject to rejection by God: it is essential for the solitary to accept the negative aspects of the spiritual life, and the dangers of neglecting these
- 25 The various names applied to "divine working" in the ministry of a solitary
- 27-30 The passions of the body and of the soul
- 31 The role of kneeling in bringing about compassion; the danger of neglecting psalmody
- 32-36 Purity of prayer and purity of heart; prayer and distraction
- 37-39 What will be judged; various kinds of vexations and "battles"
- 40-41 Two kinds of knowledge (cf. K1.25-26, 56; K3.47-49)
- 42-48 The three "summits" in the spiritual life, with the progression described, ending with total wonder in prayer
- 49-55 The need for solitude; the various hindrances and difficulties
- 56-59 How to deal with the passions
- 60-61 The level of the mode of life of the inner person; the priesthood of the intellect
- 62-63 How to tell at what stage one is
- 64-68 The stages in prayer
- 69-70 The relationship between prayer and the office

- 71 Advice for someone entering monastic life with a strong yearning for God: attach yourself to an elder, who will train you for the solitary life of stillness; keep yourself away from the lax members of the community
- 72 What books a solitary should read, and what to avoid
- 73–74 Consolation in prayer: the importance of purity, and of a proper understanding of Christ's various commandments in the New Testament—they are directed towards different categories of people, and it is not intended that a single person should keep them all
- 75–76 The principles of a solitary's mode of life, and the need to recognize what is involved
- 77 On the wrong kind of zeal
- 78–81 On God's ultimate purpose: it is God's love, not human sin, that is the reason behind the incarnation
- 82–89 Intimations of the world to come; various objections are met
- 90 The different interpretations of Scripture to be found in different Headings are not contradicting one another: some are more interior than others
- 91 Acquiring confidence in prayer
- 92–95 The stages in the life of a solitary
- 96–97 On humility
- 99–100 Doxological conclusion

Authorities Cited by Isaac

As is the case elsewhere in Parts 1 and 2, it is Evagrius who is most frequently quoted, and often by name; perhaps because of the genre, it is Evagrius' *Kephalaia Gnostika*¹⁴ that Isaac quotes most

¹⁴Antoine Guillaumont, *Les six centuries des 'Kephalaia gnostika' d'Évagre le Pontique*, *Patrologia Orientalis* 28.1 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1958). Isaac would have known S₁; for S₂ there is an English translation by Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, *Evagrius's Kephalaia Gnostica: A New Translation of the Unreformed Text from the Syriac*, *Writings from the Greco-Roman World* 38 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2015).

frequently. Next in frequency is “the Interpreter”—that is to say, Theodore of Mopsuestia, who is well-known as being seen as a key authority in the Church of the East for both theology and exegesis; for Isaac and other East Syriac monastic writers Theodore was also seen as an authority on the topic of the spiritual life. This was evidently on the basis of a number of works now lost apart from a few quotations; prominent amongst these was a work entitled “On the Perfection of (Monastic) Conduct” (*gmirutha d-dubbare*), although the only work Isaac specifically mentions by title is “On the Priesthood” (K3.94).¹⁵

A third writer to whom it is well known that Isaac was much indebted is John of Apamea, or John the Solitary, who evidently lived in the early fifth century. In Chapters 1–3 he is cited by name twice as “the blessed John,”¹⁶ the second time adding “from Apamea.”

An important source for the Egyptian monastic tradition, with which Isaac would have been familiar, is *The Paradise of the Fathers*, compiled by “Enanisho,” an older contemporary.¹⁷ This brought together Palladius’ *Lausiac History*, the *Historia Monachorum* (here attributed to Hieronymus/Jerome!), with additional materials, including a large number of *Apophthegmata*.

The only Greek Father besides Evagrius who is mentioned by name is Mark the Monk (K2.39; but only in an Elucidation), while the single non-Christian author referred to is Hippocrates, whose famous aphorism “life is short, art is long,” is quoted in an adapted form in K3.62. Vague indicators of sources, such as “the fathers,” “an elder,” “a solitary,” are usually likely to refer to Egyptian monastic

¹⁵Unidentified quotations from Theodore (probably from lost works) are to be found in Chapter 1.61, K1.19, K3.70, and K4.95.

¹⁶Chapter 1.55, and K4.93.

¹⁷There are two editions: by P. Bedjan, in his *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum* (=AMS), vol. 7 (Paris and Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1897; repr. Hildesheim, 1968) and E. A. W. Budge, *The Book of Paradise*, vols 1–2 (Cambridge, 1904), with English translation; the translation was also published separately as *The Paradise, or Garden of the Holy Fathers* (London: Lady Meux, 1907). See further J.-M. Sauget, *Une traduction arabe de la collection d'Apophthegmes de 'Enanisho'*, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, Subsidia 78 (Louvain: Peeters, 1987).

literature of one sort or other; in some cases it has been possible to identify the precise sources, but in others, not (see Index).

The Manuscript Tradition of Isaac's *Kephalaia*

Chapters 1–3 are preserved complete only in Oxford, Bodleian ms. Syr.e.7, ff.1–110r (B; 10th/11th cent.), and its late 19th-century copy, Tehran, Issayi Collection ms. 4 (1895). In B, Chapter 3, containing the four sets of *Kephalaia Gnostika*, is to be found on ff. 20v–110r.

These chapters were once present in Cambridge Or. 1144 (C) + Paris syr. 298 (P), dated c. 12th century,¹⁸ and in Harvard Syr. 57 (H), dated 13th/14th century, but in all three manuscripts only parts of the text have been preserved:

C ff. 1–6 = Chapter 1.40–67

ff. 7–9 = Chapter 1.78–96

ff. 9–11 = Chapter 2

ff. 11–16 = Chapter 3: *Kephalaia* 1.1–32

ff. 17–24 = *Kephalaia* 1.37–84.

+ P ff. 1r–10v = *Kephalaia* 3.47–73

ff. 11r–38v = *Kephalaia* 3.77–4.15, 4.20–74

H ff. 1r–5v = *Kephalaia* 4.89–100

On the basis of sample collations it would seem that only rarely do these other manuscripts offer any significant variation from the text of B, though the placement of the “Elucidations” (*nuhhare*) is quite often different: in B they are normally incorporated into the text, while in C+P they are in the margin, which is likely to represent their original position.

Excerpts from the *Kephalaia* are to be found in a number of manuscripts from all three ecclesiastical traditions, Church of the East, Syrian Orthodox, and Rum Orthodox (Melkite). It is of

¹⁸That these two fragmentary manuscripts originally belonged to one and the same manuscript was shown by Grigory Kessel, “New Manuscript Witnesses to the ‘Second Part’ of Isaac of Nineveh,” *Studia Patristica* 64.12 (2013): 245–57.

particular interest that the *Kephalaia* were known in Rum Orthodox circles in the ninth/tenth century; thus (*olim*) *Codex syriacus secundus* (dated 882), with K4.21–23 (mid), and Sinai syr. 14 (10th cent.); the latter manuscript is of particular importance since, on ff. 119r–128r, it contains a large number of extracts from Part 2, beginning with the first chapter, followed by numerous excerpts from the *Kephalaia Gnostica* (Chapter 3), and ending with a single extract from Chapter 4. Apart from some abbreviation, the text is very close to that of B. The following lists what is available:

Chapter 1.13–15; 16–21 (with some abbreviations), 34–35a; 50–52a; 55b–58a; 60b; 61b; 64; 66–69; 50 [*sic!*].

K1.56–8; 70–71; 77–78; 84–85.

K2.20; 22, 33–36; 43–44a; 47a; 61–62; 73–74.

K3.11–12; 15; 17a; 31–32; 34; 80; 87–89.

K4.36b–37a; 41; 49a, c; 50–54; 56; 67a; 68–69.

Followed by Chapter 4.3.

Excerpts from the *Kephalaia* are also found in two related Syrian Orthodox monastic anthologies: Mardin Orth. 420, dated 1471/2, and Charfet, Patriarchal Collection 181, dated 15th/16th century. Mardin Orth. 420 has K2.39–44; K3.26–38, 42–6, 61–8; K4.34–6, 49–58 (and chapter 15), while Charfet Patr. 181 provides (sometimes in abbreviated form): K2.39–44, 96–101; K3.26–29, 32–36, 42–45, 61–65; 4.35–36, 49, 56–58.¹⁹

It is thus clear that at least the *Kephalaia* from the “Second Part” were known to the Melkite (Rum Orthodox) and Syrian Orthodox traditions as well to that of the Church of the East.

The Present Translation

Isaac is not an easy author to translate, and this applies especially to the *Kephalaia*, where one sometimes has the impression that Isaac’s words were being taken down *verbatim*, without smoothing out the

¹⁹Cf. Kessel, “New Manuscript Witnesses,” 253–54.

awkward syntax, word order, and the many asides, all features more readily understandable in speech than in writing. In the translation below, while I have normally tried to keep reasonably close to the sentence structure of the Syriac, there are a number of places where it has been necessary to completely restructure and break up long sentences. Furthermore, in order to bring out more clearly what Isaac is saying, I have made ample use of explanatory wording indicated by small single guillemets: although for many readers this may seem tiresome, for those interested in penetrating Isaac's thought, it will be important to be able to distinguish what is translation and what is my interpretation, which may of course not always be correct.

For Chapters 1 and 2, for ease of reference I have adopted the paragraph numbering introduced by Louf in his French translation; it should be noted that Kavvadas, in his Modern Greek translation, has a slightly different numbering.

Needless to say, I have benefitted from earlier translations, in particular from the pioneer work of Paolo Bettolo.²⁰ Only on occasions have I preferred to give a different interpretation (a notable instance is in K1.92). In the few cases where Isaac's real meaning totally eludes me, I have indicated this in the footnotes ("translation uncertain"), sometimes with a reference to a discussion in the Textual Notes (for which, see below).

For certain recurrent terms there are no really satisfactory renderings, and rather than adopt a regular equivalence, I have usually preferred to make use of a variety of different renderings, opting for the one that seems most suitable in the context. The following is a selection of the more important and frequent terms, indicating the main range of meanings they bear:²¹

dubbara: "way of life," "conduct," "mode of life." Isaac often uses *dubbara* in connection with the three main stages of the

²⁰I am also very grateful to Valentina Duca for several very helpful suggestions.

²¹See also the Glossary in the second edition of the Holy Transfiguration Monastery's *The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian* (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 2011), 568–74.

spiritual life, terminology inherited from John of Apamea (John the Solitary) “on the level of the body” (*pagrana*), “on the level of the soul” (*napshana*), and “on the level of the spirit” (*ruhana*); for these, I have normally opted for “mode of life.”

kyana: “nature,” but very often specifically “(human) nature.”

pulhana: “practice” (corresponding to Greek *praktikē*), “work,” “ministry.”

pehya: “wandering,” but usually rendered below as “distraction.”

quṭṭa ‘a: “listlessness,” “despondency,” “accedie” (i.e., the Greek *akēdia*); and *quṭṭa* ‘re ‘yana “despair.”

teshmeshta: “ministry,” “service,” but often (liturgical) “office.” All the different monastic offices involved, above all, recitation of the Psalms.

theoria: “contemplation,” “spiritual sense/understanding.”

zaw ‘a: “stirring”: I have usually retained “stirring” for this common term (also for the related passive formation, *mettzi* ‘anuta); in several places it could also have been translated “feeling,” or even “emotion” (which etymologically has the similar idea of “movement”).

Syriac has a number of different terms for the mental faculties, and in many writers, including Isaac, it is often difficult to distinguish between them. I have regularly retained “intellect” for *hawna* (Greek *nous*), while “mind,” or occasionally “mentality,” “mindset,” represents *mad* ‘a, *re* ‘yana, and *tar* ‘ita; in some contexts *tar* ‘ita clearly indicates “intention,” what one has in mind.

Isaac clearly knew the biblical texts very well, and his wording often reflects a particular passage: very often this will be to one of the Psalms (with which he would have been extremely familiar, through the monastic office).²² One term, derived from the Gospels,

²²Psalm references follow the Septuagint numbering, which differs from the Hebrew numbering used in many English translations (see the table on p. 4).

requires special comment: whereas the original Greek used two different verbs to describe the annunciation narrative in Luke 1.35 and the reference to the moment of incarnation in John 1.14—"the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow (*episkiasēi*) you," and "the Word became flesh and dwelt (*eskēnōsen*) among us"—all the Syriac versions use the same term *aggen* in both passages, a verb that in Syriac is almost entirely restricted to some sort of divine action, usually by the Holy Spirit; it is often extended to other contexts, including the Eucharist, and thence (in monastic authors) to the transformative action of the Spirit on the individual when the gift of the Spirit, provided in potential at baptism, is properly realized in the course of the spiritual life. In order to draw attention to Isaac's use of *aggen* in that context, I have employed the unusual verb "to tabernacle."²³

Textual Notes

In order not to burden the footnotes to the translation, some points of detail on the Syriac text are presented here. In the rare places where C is available, it occasionally has a better text:

K1.7: B has *gwsym'*, "bodies," with a sublinear *yodh*, pointing to the correct reading *gsym'*, "embodied," found in C.

K1.20: B has *whwbs'*, with the *beth* erased; the correct reading, *whbs'*, "comprises," is preserved in C.

K1.55: (a) "to extra standing" in the translation implies a correction of B's *wlqnwm'* "and to a self," to *wlqwm'*. (b) The translation below offers two possible ways of taking *qdym* in the manuscript: Bettiolio renders "avanza," evidently emending *qdym* to *qdm*.

²³For this term, see further my "From Annunciation to Pentecost: The Travels of a Technical Term," in *Eulogema: Studies in Honor of Robert Taft, S.J.*, ed. Ephrem Carr, Abraham-Andreas Thiermeyer, et al., *Studia Anselmiana* 110 (Rome: Pontificio Ateneo S. Anselmo, 1993), 71–91; reprinted in *Fire from Heaven: Studies in Syriac Theology and Liturgy* (London: Variorum Reprints, 2006), chapter 13.

K1.71: B has *dhltñ'yt*, “fearfully,” whereas C has *dhyltn'yt*, “mightily,” which seems to be required in the context.

K1.92: B has *wbdry*, which I have taken as *wab-daray* “and in the courts of (the kingdom).” Bettiole has “i dispersi” (followed by Louf, Kavvadas, and Nin), taking it as a form of the verb *bdr* “to scatter,” with a reference to John 11.52. This is doubly problematic, since a passive form (*wbdry*) would be required, and any reference to “the scattered” seems completely out of place here.

K2.1: *ntdr'* “be guided”; Bettiole evidently misread the word as *ntdrg*, “be ranked.”

K2.4: *zrw't* “the sower” (fem.): I take the feminine form to refer back to *ituta* “Being.”

K2.24: B's reading seems to be *hšnšynn*, with a sublinear beth; I take it that the scribe intended *hšybynn*.

K2.34: The sense of the last sentence of the Heading is very unclear: a literal translation is “And if the recollectednesses (*kunnashe*) are scattered (*mbaddrin*) truly it is known that the intellect is also freed from images of the passions.” Bettiole attempts to provide sense with “Ma se la materia [?. Il testo porta: i raccogliamenti] è dispersa . . .,” and his introduction of “matter, material” is essentially taken up by the other translators. The problem, however, is twofold: *kunnashe* (already awkward as a plural) has no connection with the idea of “matter,” and to take “scattered” in the sense of “dispersed” goes against the negative sense of the verb earlier in the Heading. In view of these problems I have tentatively rendered *kunnashe* as “objects focused on” and retained the negative sense of “scattered,” and have accordingly needed to treat the last phrase as a question (“is it in truth clear . . .?”).

K2.39: B clearly has *mres*; since there is no root *mrs*, this should be the *af'el* participle from *rss*, “to pound, crush,” which makes no sense here. Bettiole translates “lo disprezza,” evidently (and rightly)

assuming that *mrs* is a corruption of *mds*, from *dss*, a rare verb (but also found in K3.31) meaning “to neglect.”

K2.44: B’s text has the meaningless *’pyn’*; at this point a second hand has written *’myn’* (i.e., *amina*, “continual”) in the margin, which I assume to be intended as a correction of *’pyn’*; S in fact has *’myn’*.

K2.68: the supralinear point in B above *hzyn* implies *hazeyn* “see,” but the context requires either a point under (implying *hzeyn* “seen”), or an additional *nun*, *hazeynan*, “we see.”

K2.81: B clearly has *ddāmya*, “which resembles”; but this would require a following *lamadh*, and makes no sense; Bettiolo is no doubt right in assuming that the verb intended was *rm’*, “cast, throw” (*d* and *r* differ only in the placement of a point).

K2.84: B has *m’ly’yt*, “in an exalted way,” which I have taken to be a corruption of *m’ln’yt*, “in an introductory way.”

K3.40: B has *nt’r*, which must be an error for *ntr’*.

K3.94: *d’br* (singular) in B is evidently an error for *d’brw* (plural).

K4.36: B has *mhyynn*, which could be taken either as *māheynan* “we strike out” (from *mḥ*), or as *maḥeynan*, “we bring to life” (from *hya*). Since all the other paired verbs at this point have a contrasted sense,²⁴ I have opted for the former, whereas Bettiolo preferred the latter.

K4.84: B has *dmdtršynn* “we are instructed” (or “trained”). Bettiolo, followed by the other translators, has “comprendiamo,” which seems to imply a conjectured *dmdrkynn*.

K4.93: B has *ky’yt*, with a *dalath* added by a second hand above the line, intending *dky’yt*, “purely”; perhaps, however, one might conjecture that *rkyk’yt*, “softly,” was originally intended.

²⁴The verb is here paired with *bla’*, “to be wounded,” a pairing also found in the Syriac translation of the Macarian Homilies: *Textkritische Anmerkungen zu den geistlichen Homilien des Makarios*, ed. Werner Strothmann (Wiesbaden: O. Harrasowitz, 1981), 228 (line 66).

TRANSLATION

Chapter 1

[We begin] to write the Second Part
[of Mar Isaac,] bishop of Nineveh. Letter
[to Mar Isho'zkha] concerning aspects
of the way of life of stillness.

[The first folio, with section 1, is very badly damaged and no consecutive sense can be made of what remains].

1 Since we have composed for your benefit at your [request . . .], our chosen friend Mar Isho'zkha, and for the will [. . .] that there should be repayments . . . those comforts you have prepared for us, and for the good will [. . .] and Father [. . .] does not deviate [. . .] your piety, while we, in these profitable discussions, to turn in our mind towards the way of life of the fathers, and the aim of their words, so that from them [. . .] again the substance of their ministry [. . .] I consider a [. . .] of grace, for continually [. . .] of profit in their two kinds [. . .] laying hold of the body and so[ul . . .] no less [. . .] by its profit to find from it [. . .] those things in the search for which I have been negligent out of laziness, and to traverse those meadows, resplendent with flowers, of the road of the fear of God [. . .] by careful repetition [. . .] thoughts on it, I neglected [. . .] them in my mind, and to cause my vision to wander over them. [Therefore], placing as my aim your love, I will [. . .] with you. I have not done this as someone audacious [. . .] you were expecting it already, but from the warmth of my love towards you—such that even at night I have wandered off in my dreams to converse with you. Now love

continually oversteps the boundary—which is something that you too were desirous of discovering.

2 [*The need for faith*]

The beginning¹ of all our life in God, my brother, is for you to be healthy in your faith *as you travel* on the road of your *ascetic* way of life, so that from here you may suck the entire sweetness that the Spirit has placed in the Holy Scriptures. I am not speaking of how you confess God, for it is superfluous to mention this to those who have abandoned the world and who follow after God; but that you should be assured in your hope, with an undoubting faith, of all the good things that are set out on this path, and have been handed down to us in the holy Scriptures—things to which ascetics have attained and do attain.

3 When you hear the testimonies of the fathers concerning the glory of the solitary way of life, full of mysteries, which the Holy Spirit has set down in their writings as an incentive, seeing that they were the first, do not grow despondent, for you will attain to discernment of these things [...] with you already, even though the Spirit has placed in you a *t[aste]* of them a while ago. They are yours *in due course*, but it is not *yet* the time: the Lord knows the time when it is appropriate to give *them* to you, for these good things are kept by him for you and those like you: whether here, or whether there, by all means they are yours, provided only you will live within the sheepfold in accordance with the will of him who will crown you. He himself desires to give them to you, but you are not able at present to receive in the way that you desire until, when their *due* time arrives, the Lord will cause knowledge of them to shine out in you without any asking on your part.

[*The consequences of a lack of faith*]

Beware lest you become unbelieving, when you seek *for things*, but fail to find them near at hand, lest from this something be born for you that you are not looking for and do not know; for unbelief

¹Lit. head.

receives a punishment. Do not say that “I have labored for so long and have not found anything,” or that “the true reality² of the matter does not correspond to the greatness of the words.” Beware of this idea, for punishment follows close upon unbelief; the heart that is unbelieving is condemned.

4 What is the punishment? That you should fall from here into despair through the sense of abandonment caused by your unbelief; then despair will hand you over to despondency, and despondency will deliver [you] up to laxity, and this will remove you from your hope. There is no [great]er evil than this that can come upon you.

5 [*The need for constancy and perseverance*]

Know, O my brother, dear friend of my soul, that stillness and every ascetic way of life that exists yield up their fruits in accordance with due time and one's occupation with them. “Stillness and the quiet of the cell come to pass in accordance with a person's constancy and guard,” as a certain holy elder said.³ If you are bereft of constancy and evenness of ministry, do not expect the true consolation that comes from them. You are not even firmly grounded in the habitual practice of these—which customarily [...] the weariness involved in them. And since you are continually just beginning, because of the distance in between,⁴ you will not be found to be well-trained in anything: before your mode of life has begun producing fruits, you have become distracted away from it.

6 Every mode of life that is without stability and is short-lived will also be found to be without any fruits. In saying this, my purpose is not to confound you, but I am showing you a goal and a path. Take as an example a tree that is planted, and that has someone unwise to tend it: when it sheds its first leaves and has begun to produce new buds, he continually deprives it of the usual watering, and so the tree becomes blighted and withered. Then again a long interval

²Lit. precision.

³Source unidentified; perhaps compare *AMS* 7:907.

⁴I.e., before receiving benefit.

passes in between before the power of water affects it and it draws strength from the ground and revives. And perhaps *that man* might frequently transplant it from one location to another; and maybe he regularly shakes its roots, striking them constantly with something for that purpose. Yet in spite of all this, the man wonders “How does it fail to produce any fruit for us?” It is exactly the same with an undisciplined person: he does not judge his affairs on the basis of the manner of his way of life, but rather demands from God what *he considers* appropriate, *claiming* that he does not have anything of what is due to him. I leave aside the secret things of the mind, on the basis of which it is God’s intention to judge a person’s affairs; nevertheless he is going to require of us even these external aspects of the *ascetic* way of life as well—whether we also have the outward ordering of *this* way of life, in accordance with its rank.

7 When a person is deficient in any of the things that are useful for his way of life, he cannot complete his course in quiet or receive his crown, since at the time of crowning, that deficiency will disturb and trouble the eye of the soul. Rather, it is necessary that *a person’s* manner of life should be well prepared with all the requisite things, whether these pertain to the body or to the soul.

8 Just as in the case of a ship’s captain, if he lacks one part of the boat’s tackle, he is unable to make even a short voyage by sea until he possesses absolutely everything *needed* and has it all with him in the ship; so also with the person who travels on the path of the solitary life and wishes to enjoy its [fruit]s and [acquire] hope in God in his soul, if there is lacking in him some small thing from all that is needed for his journey, that missing small thing will render unprofitable everything *else* when the time comes and the use of it is required.

9 This *solitary* mode of life first of all requires time, and constancy during it. For if it is not possible for someone to learn skills of *this* world until he has remained a considerable time constantly engaged

in them—and «only» then does «his» mind get hold of the goal and mode of putting into practice the skill that he has set out to learn: how much more does this apply to us. If a skill that can be seen by the eyes requires so much time and constant study, how much more so «in the case of» the skill of the Spirit, which the eye does not see. It is not known from whom a person learns this, and it requires much purity: its teacher is the Spirit, and the skill is hidden, while those who seek to hinder it are disembodied. It requires much time and constancy of practice. The body too will act deceitfully against a person all the time he is learning it, and the obstacles it puts in his way are abundant and innumerable.

10 For this reason, O reader, this way of life requires before all other things time and constancy in it, and after that, perseverance, since by means of that a person will endure in labors and persist in solitude and the afflictions that belong to it; for this is the hardest and most difficult aspect of this way of life, because of the multitude of battles that occur in it as a result of isolation from everyone; «likewise it is necessary» not to change quickly from what one has started upon, but rather to endure in it until it is completed—like a mother in her birth pangs giving birth.⁵

11 [*The need for a proper balance*]

Another thing required is evenness of «the solitary's» way of life, so that in all the different kinds of labors a person's way of life should be evenly tempered: he should be rich not only in the one or two labors that he likes, following the desire of his will, and labor in them «alone», while being empty of others for which there is a more pressing need. Rather, his way of life should be evenly balanced in its constituent parts, in the process of discovering all the labors of excellence.

12 Corresponding to reading «there should be» the office; corresponding to the office, kneeling down; corresponding to kneeling

⁵Cf. Jn 16.21.

down, fasting; corresponding to fasting, the labors during the nights, and with them the hidden ministry of the mind, so that when the body is laboring, the heart should not be relaxed and left alone. Rather, the faculty of rationality in the heart should be aware of what lies hidden within this visible ›human‹ nature ›of ours‹, how all these things that this visible ›body‹ performs are required for its own advantage.

13 When the demons see someone travelling along in the light of his intellect as a result of the evenness of ›his‹ ministry and his measured labors, then the demons fight against him, trying to unbalance him, so that he either diminishes or increases one of these ›labors‹: both procedures are equally harmful. The ›harmonious‹ disposition of the body serves as a type of the ›harmonious‹ disposition of the ›ascetic‹ way of life, for when there is an imbalance in one of the parts, this at once effects an upset in the body, whence illnesses proceed. Similarly with ›ascetic labors‹: when one of the things that lead to the establishment of the soul's good health is added, ›or‹ when one is taken away, this effects the same thing.

14 Through increase and through decrease equally darkness occurs within the soul; for the demons tremble exceedingly at a ›balanced‹ measure. Therefore, if they are unable to hinder a person's eagerness by means of ›various‹ pretexts, so as to cause him to cease his constant course, or to defile his manner of life, the ›demons‹ will fight against him by means of ›his‹ fervor, loading him with excesses, so that he collapses under them. A wise person, however, will be equally wary of increasing the load as he is of becoming slothful.

15 Everything that takes place in due measure is practiced in orderliness. But when one passes beyond this boundary, confusion enters the scene, and once a person is confused, he does not know what he is doing.

16 A person also needs to have disregard for the body in everything, so that he can hold on to frugality in all his affairs, so that the ›body‹

does not demand a status in everything, in all the details [. . .]; rather, that person should acquire a disregard for all the arrangements of *‘this world’* here, fulfilling only what is of utility. For if he gives himself over to this,⁶ he will not be capable of retaining a hold over all his own affairs.

17 [*The need for a courageous heart*]

Courage of heart is also required, so that someone does not despair amid the conflicting changes that befall him for the purpose of testing him, and so that his knowledge grows. For it is necessary that one should be wise *‘in knowing’* what belongs to the right hand, and what to the left, just as it seemed good to Paul that “the man of God should be perfect, and accomplished in every good action,”⁷ the conclusion of which comes from training in perseverance. “Therefore endure evils, like a good soldier of Jesus Christ”:⁸ no one prevails in his fight without wisdom, and no one acquires wisdom without a fight, according to Evagrius.⁹

18 “Insofar as the soul makes progress in virtue, to the same extent will mighty adversaries encounter it.”¹⁰ But the soul with which there is no battle is deprived of virtue. For virtue received its name from this very thing, that it became resplendent and was fit for a crown as a result of the various temptations that came upon it.

19 [*Do not give up if prayer seems to be unanswered*]

Much long-suffering is also required, so that a person does not become faint-hearted in his expectation: if he expects, but does not receive at once, or if he asks and it is not granted in the way he imagined, or he waits a long time for a response to his request, then he should not feel doubt in his hope and become distraught, despondent, and sickly in his conscience.

⁶I.e., what is of utility.

⁷2 Tim 3.17.

⁸2 Tim 2.3.

⁹Evagrius, *Praktikos* 73; *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, trans. R. E. Sinkewicz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 110.

¹⁰Evagrius, *Praktikos* 59 (Sinkewicz, p. 108).

20 [*Stillness and faith*]

Furthermore, after all these—and *indeed* prior to them all, and more than them all, as I mentioned earlier at the beginning—stillness of body and an assured faith in the soul are required, for these encompass the *other* things spoken of, and, with a person's own care, bring him to perfection. These are things that a person should ask for in prayer and with tears that it may be granted to him by God that these remain with him, since it is by means of them that the ministry of all these virtues is performed and accomplished, as well as the other things that have not been mentioned. For without them there is no possibility that a single one of the things mentioned can be accomplished.

«This applies to» stillness because it guards the senses from outward turmoil, and gives the opportunity for labors of both body and soul by means of the peace that it confers through the freedom¹¹ that belongs to it, and *«through»* the heedfulness that resides in both the body and the soul, and *«through»* the abolition of the usual causes that dash against a person in his outward dealings, whether it be voluntarily, or from casual events.

«Likewise with» faith, because it will strengthen him in hope, so that he endures all the dangers that come upon him with delight, for the sake of these divine things. As a result, a person will not even be disquieted by death or feel pain as a bodily being, but like someone who has a hope that transcends the body, being possessed of a brave heart whose courage lies in God, who daily expects departure from the body, and who in his thought is in travail at every moment *«to give birth»* to that future hope on behalf of which he suffers daily, and for the sake of which he endures all these difficulties willingly, in order that he may reach safely the resurrection from the dead.

21 For the delight of the hope that is born from faith is wont to defy all difficulties.

¹¹Lit. emptiness.

22 To the extent that labors increase, grace is poured out—that is, when constancy is combined with them. To the extent that expectation increases, a person has fewer sufferings.¹² To the extent that wisdom shines forth, so a person enters into joy. For in wisdom he is united to God and wrapped in his love, and he is released from union with the passions,¹³ and in joy he prevails over afflictions. It is easy for joy to forget both the world and the body.

23 [Discernment]

We should entreat God to grant us also to recognize the different kinds of spirits, and «to distinguish» true revelations from those of the demons, and the vision of the holy powers «of heaven» from Satan's apparitions, likewise, to distinguish among the impulses that «come» in dreams between those that come from angels, and those from the demons, «and» those that «originate» from the soul, «and to discern» the thoughts that become established in the mind as a result of these three kinds of impulse that a person grasps and discerns—as the fathers say—from the composure or the turmoil that accompanies each one of them, and from the peace or disturbance,¹⁴ from the joy and confidence, or the fear and sadness: those listed in first place properly belong, while the latter ones are of alien origin—whether they belong to thoughts or to dreams, or «arise» in the senses and by touch.

24 In the case of the «stirrings» of the soul it is evident that none of these accompanies them—neither joy nor sadness, nor disturbance nor peace; but they are ordinary impulses that pass by without bearing anything at all. «By impulses» of the soul you should understand those that belong before you enter the «soul's true» natural realm, which is limpidity.

25 It is evident also in the case of the stirrings that the body sets into motion: even if «this has to do» with the stirrings of desire, or

¹²Or: passions.

¹³Or: sufferings.

¹⁴Cf. Evagrius, *Praktikos* 80 (Sinkewicz, p. 110).

with something else apart from these, when *the body* is attached without any external conflict to them, those stirrings are not mixed in with the intense enticements that are mingled with them and the impulses that are difficult to control. Rather, nature demands in a tranquil way what it needs, remaining pacified in its movements. For there is no disorderliness in what God has established; rather he provides in *human* nature complete moderation and order.

26 But when some alien activation is mingled, together with them, into the natural movements that *occur* in us, *a person* knows *this* from the disorder, confusion, and disturbances that are aroused in us: whether this be by *means of* an awareness *originating* from the body, or whether it be by *means of* thoughts concerning the memory of *various* things, or by *means of* accidental occurrences, we should understand them as we have said—insofar as they can be grasped when grace is close at hand.

27 These are the things that it is necessary for someone to remind his friend of *when they are* together, and they should have them continually in mind by means of their soul's pondering.

28 Fasting, prayer, and the rest are familiar to everyone, though I shall not omit to show in their due place the assistance that comes from these things that are easy for everyone, as well as those things that are considered by many people to be insignificant. Even though everyone who has a concern for his salvation possesses some of them in part, yet because he does not know the reason for doing them, not everyone is close to *receiving* the fruits that come from them. This is all the more so since they do not know the rank that they should accord to the things that they carry out; this is because these things have no order, and evenness of carrying them out is not present, in that they are without measurement, and of short duration, and the performance *of them* is not measured and constant.

29 What is more feeble than drops of water? Is it not the case that over a long and constant period that they wear holes in stones, and

make deep fissures in hard rocks?¹⁵ So it is with continual ministry: even though it may concern a small thing, «yet» as a result of constancy it builds up immense treasures.

30 [*An easy rule for the weak*]

I will show you now an easy rule that is useful for someone who is weak; by it one can easily progress, and the delight that is born from it after a little is sufficient to draw the mind to its constant «observance», so that that you can carry out its ministration eagerly, without constraint, and in composure.

31 It is this: because the feeble body grows weary of standing continually on its feet in order to fulfil the customary acts of worship, and for this reason it is often enough hindered from those continual prayers that are performed with the body, out of which «prayer» in the heart is born, you should fall down many times on your face at your seat—just as is described by your own hands—and spend a while in supplication, in such a way that converse with the Scripture may be intermingled with prayer. Then, the light that you will receive from these two quarters will be raised up, to your soul's enjoyment. As a result, prayer will give you delight because of reading, and you will be again illumined in reading by means of the keys of prayer. For in prayer the gate to insights is opened before the mind, and these insights in turn, as a result of their astonishing nature, arouse once more the desire for prayer, corresponding with the contemplation that «comes» from them.

32 [*Contemplative prayer*]

Prayer that is set in motion as a result of contemplation is no ordinary «prayer»: it binds the mind strongly so that it collects itself together and gives birth to earnest and pure prayers in a carefree way. A person is not capable of standing all the time in the presence of the power of the insights, or to make use of the operation of his senses

¹⁵Isaac alludes to the same observation in Discourse 46 of “Part One” (ed. Bedjan, pp. 331–32); cf. Poemen in *Paradise of the Fathers* 3.620 (AMS 7:686), though the wording is different.

in a free manner, for very often these are too powerful for a person to turn to himself and make use of prayer: frequently no strength is left in the soul to turn to the senses and to activate them, or to make use of the body in the normal manner, since the soul is overcome by the force of wonder. This is not the case with all insights: there are insights that give birth to prayer, and there are others that give birth to silence. Anyone who has had experience of these things will understand the differences.

33 Therefore, my brother, if the higher path is not possible, we should act as I have said, with constant standing up from our place, apart from the seven times ordained¹⁶ because of the body that is sick. Let us not desist from this even after we have received assistance, for idleness gives birth to death, even in a state of weakness.

Accordingly, as I have written down above, fall on your face many times by your seat. If a book is in your hands, or some piece of work, set it down and fall on your face and spend a time in supplication. Let this be your rule all your life, everywhere and in every place you happen to be, whether in the wilderness, or somewhere inhabited, when you are alone by yourself.¹⁷ I in my wretchedness am not capable of indicating to you what will be born out of these things for you, even in ten thousand quires of writing.

34 [*The reason for bodily labors*]

It is not out of fear that we carry out bodily labors, or that we aim to be alert in our soul, but because we know that bodily ease keeps us distant from God, and keeps our mind far away from being concerned about him—out of which desire for him is born in our soul.

¹⁶Cf. Canon 8 of *The Canons Ascribed to Mārūthā of Maipherqat and Related Sources*, trans. Arthur Voobus, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 439 (Leuven: Peeters, 1982), 98. Cf. Ps. 118(119).164, and R. Taft, SJ, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 227. Likewise Part II, xiv.35, referring to Canon 54 of the “73 Canons of Nicaea,” ed. A. Voobus, *The Canons Attributed to Mārūthā of Maipherqat* (CSCO, Scr. Syri 192, 1982), 82.

¹⁷Or: with your soul.

35 Also we abhor distraction, and we shun converse with our honored and beloved brethren: this is not because we despise them, or because they are not better than we—for you see that we daily take refuge in their prayers; rather, it is because we are *thereby* deprived of enjoyment with our Lord by constantly being with people. For the solitary life unites us to God.

36 Thus it is not as a result of terror at the scourges of Gehenna that we observe the rules in detail and show care over them, eagerly carrying them out; rather, it is because converse with God is *to be found* in them and they establish within us the remembrance of him, for *by means of* everything that is *done* for his sake and in his name, through recollection we are raised up to him. Constant mindfulness for these details engenders in us a constant mindfulness of him. That is to say, we should not abandon the time *of prayer*, without compelling circumstances, and should we by chance transgress, we should not be without *a feeling of* suffering.

37 [*On appropriate outward conduct*]

Also, we should compel ourselves to make prostrations¹⁸ in the office, even if we are very ill—and sometimes, even on our bed, whether our going to sleep be with alertness and with reverence, and whether it be with freedom of speech; and with pain of heart we should groan to God for a great *length of* time, that he preserve us from impurity of thoughts and from foul dreams; and we should strive so that sleep overtake us while concern for him is in our heart. And we should take our seat modestly at all the Hours; and, *as if* under the compulsion of death, we should observe the number of our prayers; and *I need not mention* whether we should define a specific moment for the time of our sustenance—or how we should not continually start eating whatever we happen to find, apart from at the proper time; or whether it is only once that we should prepare the table *for a meal*, being wary to restrain our mouth from snacks at other hours *of the day*—except in the case of great feebleness arising from illness; or

¹⁸Lit. kneeling.

that we should not uncover our bodies and carefully scrutinize our bare limbs when they are uncovered by garments; or that we should not continually be touching our body like lax-hearted and undisciplined people; or how we should preserve continual silence when we happen to be outside, and that, if someone meet us, we should keep to the minimum of what is necessary and dispense our words only for what is useful, and not for superfluities, joking, and laughter; or that our gaze should be continually in a state of self-recollection, and that we should maintain propriety with regard to our senses, and that we should display an indication of mournfulness on our faces as we gaze continually and at every moment on the subject of our Lord's passion; for by it we are raised up to a recollection of what he bore on behalf of the human race, and to that love that he manifested to us, to those promises that he promised us, and hope reserved for the human race in the New World and especially for the band of Christians—all the things that were made known to everyone at the coming of Christ into the world; for through him we have a means of approach to God, as the Apostle says.¹⁹ For "One person died on behalf of many"²⁰ and "By the sacrifice of his body he reconciled the world with his Father,"²¹ delivered us from servitude to demons, and rescued us from the dominion of their tyranny.

38 [*Awareness of God*]

As a result, we minister to God, having become aware of our Creator; and just as we serve and worship him in every place, «so» we are not afraid of anything—as was the case in former generations, when people were in terror of demons. And what a hope this is that has been preached to us, when a person henceforth becomes inebriated with joy at these things, not knowing where he is or to what sort of knowledge we have been brought near to in Christ!

¹⁹Eph 5.2.

²⁰2 Cor 5.14.

²¹Heb 10.10.

39 Then again, turning to himself, he «considers» how, in all this, «God» is wronged by us, and how we scorn what he loves and the things he has commanded, even though these things are intended for the salvation of our lives and for the assistance of each other. With these things in mind all the time, suffering is spread over our face, whether we are alone, or when we happen to be with others. This suffering preserves us against relaxation, and these recollections keep our hearts serious.

40 [*How monastic observances are misjudged*]

These and similar «observances», my brother, are not because he demands us by force to be careful about them. Some people «who think they are» wise, not even knowing the reason for these things, and only looking on their externals, despise the chaste brethren for these observances and say to the brethren: “Will God «really» cast you into Gehenna because of these things?” or “Will they «really» raise you up to heaven if you keep them?” And they call those who keep to them “hypocrites” and “uneducated.” Let us, however, who are aware of what is born in our souls as a result of them, carefully perform them with joy; and because we know the benefit that comes to us, let us rejoice in the careful observance of our labors that are for the sake of God, and let us await expectantly for the many good things that come from him, even in this world, in all the actions, small and great, that are done for the sake of his name.

41 [*The value of small observances*]

If one of the fathers bids that, as a result of just being seated unoccupied in one’s cell, sitting there without any work and merely guarding the walls for the sake of the name of Christ,²² one should have great hope, how much more in the case of the person who manifests all these particular features in himself for the sake of the continual remembrance of God!

²²Cf. *Apophthegmata*, Alphabetic Collection, Moses 6; *Give Me a Word: The Alphabetical Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. John Wortley, Popular Patristics Series 52 (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2014), 195.

42 We should not pay attention, my brother, to the fact that he is not demanding of us small actions that are despised, but rather we should be astonished at the fact that when we do carry out these small actions, he raises us up by means of them to great things. What we discover by means of these small observances is as greatly exalted and glorious as fire is greater than the flint and iron from which it issues.

By these actions, not only are we preserved from the subtle paths that lead to evil as a result of neglectfulness, but we are also raised up by means of them to glorious things.

43 Continuous reflection on these tiny and insignificant things gives birth in us to reflection on him, and by means of this ordinary reflection on occasion we imagine that we are in luminous converse with him, and our eyes are filled with tears and our soul exults with joy; and at another time we find ourselves as though we were standing in the midst of the resurrection of the just, and wonder falls upon us as we are drawn up by contemplation from this world, this life, and the recollection of earthly affairs, and we are united with God in that spiritual union that is exalted above the world. In this way, love is born in our soul as a result of continual reflection on him and frequent converse with him; and by love we are mingled with God at every moment and our lives are commingled with his Spirit, as we anticipate that mode of life to come.

44 The person who has been held worthy of constant reflection on God is also held worthy of constant wonder at God.

45 [*The right sort of reading*]

Make use of reading—not the kind that leads us to acquire what comes from education, but the kind that deadens your passions and manifests to you the short and clear-cut path that leads to God, which will quickly and without any [. . .] raise you up to a luminous ministry, to the place to which your solitary way of life is looking. I have in mind the sort of reading that does not speak in a confused

way, now on one topic and now on another, sometimes introducing matters that harm and upset your spiritual meditation that belongs above the world; «no,» do not read anything that speaks in a common sort of way; or anything that indiscriminately instructs both you and ordinary people; or the sort that is of use for teaching all ranks of people equally; or the kind that leads you to acquire verbal disputation and training in the wisdom of this world; or the kind that informs you about the affairs and quarrels that have taken place in the Church, or the canons, and the affairs of kings, their victories and histories; or the polemic words and refutations of opposing parties.

46 Let us leave all this kind of reading to the healthy, whereas we in our sickness should make use of medicines—topics that are «specifically» collected together for the healing of our passions, and the lives of the saints who have lived before our time, who conducted their solitary life in a manner that transcends the world; and accounts of the revelations that came to them, and the teaching that they received from God concerning the ordering of this «solitary» way of life, and concerning the sufferings and battles that they encountered for their own instruction and for «the benefit of» those who travel in their footsteps; and concerning the various kinds of victory and defeat, and the recoveries and falls that they endured.

47 In short: let us occupy ourselves with books that are solely «devoted to» the monastic way and that tell of its ordering and outward form.

48 Not even bread, which is so nutritious, can help a sickly stomach; mostly it will be better put aright by means of other foods and by medicines. This is not because the bread is of no use, but rather the stomach that receives it is sickly. Everything is good in its own place, but for us it is not useful.

49 In the case of a person who—prior to gaining control over his thoughts and vanquishing distraction, his senses still being sickly and his conscience infirm—makes use of «the kind of» reading that

shows him to be cultured and learned, an exegete and rich in ideas—whereas he is in fact subject to the passions: such a person has been wounded by the desire to boast and by ignorance. What knowledge is more excellent than purity? For purity reveals everything to your mind provided all your concern is that it should be present, and it will bring you close to the gift of divine vision.

50 [*What one should concentrate on*]

Be eager to learn everything that will cause the temporal world to be disregarded in your eyes, that will arm you with wisdom against the demons who are all ready to *bring* you to perdition, and that will prepare for you illumination of thoughts and continual *expectation of* departure from the body, as well as release from lusts through recollection of the world to come and the contemplative vision of it.

51 Draw your mind up from the recollection of lusts so that there may be space in your soul for the glorious things of God to be revealed in it, in order that your mind may become enriched with spiritual wealth, and you may be perpetually captivated by love for God.

52 As a result of wonder at God's revelations the righteous are inebriated with love for God. One of the saints did well to say that the souls that have gazed upon him have forgotten their place of abode. He is speaking of the *kind of* vision, the memory of which inebriates the soul: "Vision gives birth to love"—according to one of the *saints* clothed in God²³—and this *vision* is to be found through purity, in accordance with our Lord's promise.²⁴

Now purity is not a thing that can be collected from a knowledge of superfluous matters and a vast quantity of teachings, but it is established by the cleansing of the thought process from the inadequacy of recollections of earthly things, and by the meditation of the ministry of stillness. Very harmful to *purity* are a multitude

²³Unidentified.

²⁴Cf. Mt 5.8.

of thoughts and thronging recollections of novel «ideas» that are born from teachings and diverse studies, and which lead the soul to distraction.

53 Do not let go of what is valuable by launching yourself into things that fill you only with what is useful for boasting. Our purpose is not to know many things, but that knowledge itself may shine out from our way of life. I am not praising boorishness in what I am saying; rather, I am «wanting to» restrain the pursuit of superfluous matters that are not very necessary on our path, the quest for which hinders «our» taking care over purity.

54 Look at your sickness, and make use of the medicines for it; be aware of «what you need for» your journey, and make ready the provisions for it; look at your fight «ahead», and learn the skills «needed for» it; be wise in your training, and seek out instructors for it.

55 Even though your teachers may be very enlightened, your staff should continually be in your hand: do not enter the sea without a staff, and do not walk in the dark cloud without a stick; it will turn away dogs, it will crush serpents, it will feel out the sea, it will get rid of wild beasts. The blessed John called it “the crook of the feeble.”²⁵ Lean upon it and you will never fall, for there is no help like God, and those who knock with diligence will receive everything. Blessed is the person who remembers, wherever he is, never to neglect the following: continual prayer, continual recollection of God. A person who prays constantly is constantly mindful of God. Someone who is constantly mindful of God is the abode of the Spirit. Reflection on God is prayer, and a mind in which stirrings concerning him continually revolve is one that is continually in prayer, and no moment is spent idle by it.

²⁵Since Isaac calls John of Apamea “blessed John” in K4.93, this John is also likely to be John of Apamea (though this quotation is not from any work of his that has so far been published).

56 [*Prayer*]

Prayer does not consist only of the repeating of words, but it is also the stirrings that well up concerning the divine Being from the depth of the mind. As a result of constant meditation on him the mind is at times altered, so that it gazes upon him as though in awestruck wonder, its stirrings being united to the Spirit, and in a manner that is ineffable it observes him closely. Blessed is the person who continually tarries by his door without feeling ashamed!

57 Do not rely on knowledge of yourself, lest you be abandoned into the hands of the demons, and they will bring you into the entanglements of their crafty snares, where they will surround you with consternation and you will become utterly confused, not even knowing where you stand.

58 Without first making supplication do not put forth your foot to travel—especially on paths that are obscure. Let entreaty not become silent from your mouth, and accompanying your entreaty should be acknowledgement of your weakness and ignorance—so that at least because of your humility you may be carried by mercy, even though you are not worthy. Where work is lacking, humility and acknowledgement are fully accepted before God in its place, and in return for deeds that have not been performed, the person who has shown himself humble receives a wage!

59 [*Humility*]

Dearer to God is the person who stands in humility because he is deficient in what is required, than the person who considers that he is doing a favor to God because of the abundance of his deeds. But the person who possesses both ministry and humility has established two great luminaries within himself: these will give that person enjoyment at them, and they will give joy to God at all times.

60 Where the first is lacking, the excellence of the second will make up for its deficiency. The controlling strength of humility in the soul consists in the drudgery of voluntary labors that are borne in the

form of the recollection of sins that have been committed: without these things it is not possible to escape from daily sins or to receive forgiveness for past transgressions. Even if we do not have labors, we do have the possibility of feeling contrite in our mind, of being continually mindful of our sins, with a low opinion of ourselves before God; of being gentle and peaceful towards «our fellow» human beings, holding everyone in honor, of being recollected in ourselves, of not «engaging in» joking or gossip, of having a good word for everyone, and of having thanksgiving in our heart at times of trials, of wise silence and disciplined limbs, of remembering that by all means we are mortal and that we will depart from this world. «All» these things do not «necessarily» require labors of the body, but they are an adornment of the mind.

61 [*God looks to the desire of the will*]

In the case of a person who neglects to take hold of himself even in the things that do not «also» require labors of the body—which are established otherwise than by the body's labors and strength, and which instead can be acquired in a state of weakness—such a person has abandoned himself to negligence of mind, and he is justly held blameworthy by God. God does not need extensive ministry as much as the will's virtue: a virtuous soul is not chosen by God as a result of deeds, but because of a virtuous will «that is directed» towards him, and a heart that is always full of contrition. Similarly, he does not separate the sinful soul as a result of comparing its actions: for often actions are prevented from being carried out for «various» causes; also many things, both good and bad, are done without the will being involved. Rather, God looks at the desire of the will, «to see» in what it takes pleasure. And «so» virtue of soul, even without deeds, is sufficient for him if the possibility «of deeds» is not there—just as the blessed Interpreter says:²⁶ “In his law-giving our Lord is seen to be making a close examination of the soul's will, more than of deeds.” And in another place he says, as it were in

²⁶Theodore of Mopsuestia, perhaps from his lost *Book of Perfection of Conduct*.

the person of our Lord, taking a cue from his words: "I require the will, while I do not investigate in the same way concerning actions, in that a soul that clings with a perfect will to virtue is sufficient for me. Those under the Law of Moses investigate concerning actions, being pricked in conscience by all sorts of wrongdoings, even tiny ones. But in the case of those who belong to my law, even if they do wrong, being human, where they know that they are choosing what is virtuous in their conscience, they live in joy."²⁷

62 There is no need for me to remind you of self-emptying.²⁸ It is not our intention to speak of everything, and it is not as if we were speaking to someone who does not know the Scriptures. For you are well aware that without «self-emptying» this way of life cannot be brought to perfection. This path is one of poverty. It is clear that a person who does not have faith in God in matters that are visible is a long way in his mind from the hope of things to come, as well as other things whose reality's power is only felt in the mind by faith—the very things that the entire purpose of our words is holding in sight, from the very beginning up to this point; for it is by hope that this mode of life is perfected. "No one who is carrying the burden of earthly matters will fly up towards heaven," as it is written.²⁹ For no one who is bound up in the affairs of this world can please the One who has chosen him. But I will remind you «only» of what is necessary.

63 If you have chosen to accomplish virtue, never at all allow yourself to catch sight of a woman, or to pass by in the vicinity of one. These recollections are inimical to this concern «of ours», for you are a solitary, whose mind is exalted above things subject to corruption.

²⁷Theodore, perhaps from the same work.

²⁸For the important term *msarrquta* "self-emptying" (based on Phil 2.7), see Sebastian P. Brock, "Radical Renunciation: The Ideal of *Msarrquta*," in Robin Darling Young and Monica J. Blanchard, eds, *To Train His Soul in Books: Syriac Asceticism in Early Christianity* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 122–33.

²⁹Unidentified.

But if the thought of «women» disturbs the mind, how much more does the sight of their presence or the sound of their talking; do not rely on old age, or the virtue of your mind—not that you are otherwise disposed, but because this is a useful «practice»: for we should not seek to make trial of what has been experienced by many people! Instead, sit in your cell, and be concerned for the salvation of your life, awaiting expectantly your departure from the world, as someone who realizes that he is mortal.

64 [*Do not judge others*]

Take care over your thoughts, and do not think of anyone or look on anyone as being bad: on another occasion you may see in quite a different light this person who now seems to you to be bad. Accordingly, do not follow up thoughts that show you whatever they like. But if there is love, it will also cover up the faults «of others»,³⁰ whereas an absence of love comes from darkness of soul.

65 Someone who does not love his neighbor but says that he loves God³¹ has gone totally astray in his soul without knowing it. There is nothing at which God is so angered, or which is so vexatious in his presence as the person who sits in his cell thinking about his companion, having made his cell the court room where he is the judge who judges the deficiencies of others. And «yet» he considers himself a penitent and says in prayer “As I have forgiven, forgive me”!³²

66 If the person who judges those who trespass against him incurs for himself great condemnation before God’s justice, what will happen to us when we judge actions at a distance? If you cannot bear to see the deficiencies and weaknesses of others and cannot endure it in your mind, then go off somewhere else. Otherwise, how «do you think it» is possible for us to see everyone as good when we do not possess stillness?

³⁰Cf. Jas 5.20.

³¹Cf. Jn 4.20.

³²Cf. Mt 6.12.

67 Be peaceable and humble, so that you may find compassion for everyone. Outward circumstances appear in various lights, corresponding to the activity of the heart, whether it *be directed* towards what is good, or towards temptations. Do not be a reprover or corrector of anyone, and do not be zealous and agitated in your soul. In the case of a person whose mind is continually in a state of zeal and agitation at *his fellow* human beings, it is not possible for him to be held worthy of that spiritual peace in which insights concerning God's kindness towards *both* worlds are set into motion. Zeal occurs in a person as a result of the mind's wandering, in that it has been allowed to wander about *looking at* everyone's actions—like a ship without a helmsman.

68 In the case of a person who is distracted and becomes zealous over people's evil deeds, it is not possible for him to become dead to the world.

69 A person becomes perpetually clothed in zeal over the way of life of other people in two different ways: either it is from pride or from stupidity. Outside these two causes there is no room for someone to become full of zeal: either it is because his own blemishes are less in his own eyes than those of everyone else—and maybe he thinks they do not even exist at all! and as a result *he considers* he is capable of bringing everyone to the truth—or he imagines he is being a friend of God when he hates sinners. This is a mentality of utter stupidity, and one that is totally alien to all knowledge of God: such a person does not realize that the saints accepted all kinds of death on behalf of wicked men and murderers in order to bring them to the way of God by means of love.

70 Those who are aware of God's purpose, and who have been held worthy to know fully his will, will die for the sake of sinners in the likeness of the Son of God.³³

³³Cf. 1 Pet 3.18.

71 [A short prayer to Christ]

O Christ, the immense delight whose hope is far exalted above human thought, sow your hope in my thoughts, so that by the perception of you, my mind may be released from gazing on earthly things. It is not possible, Lord, for it to be released from distraction over earthly things except by being distracted by you, nor is it possible to see anyone as being bad, unless one is utterly alien to the knowledge of your hope, having one's vision confined, like a mole,³⁴ on the ground.

72 Hold me worthy Lord, to be dead from everything, and in this deadness from everything, may I be held worthy of the perception of the mystery of the New Life.

73 Those who live to this world have not ever been found worthy of perceiving that knowledge, Lord, only those who have become dead in their lifetime for the sake of that true hope that is kept in reserve, and who offer up to God prayer with tears at every moment, making their prayer with an intense love that no one from the race of humanity be left outside that delight.

74 This is the saints' way of thinking, and this is the reason for the suffering that is continually spread over their minds; and this is their prayer that they offer up to God at all times. And with this will, they receive from that rich treasury of God the gift to which the world cannot compare. Blessed is the person who knows what is born out of love for human beings, and to what a height compassion raises up the soul!

³⁴Cf. Mark the Monk, *Concerning Those Who Imagine That They Are Justified by Works* 73; *Counsels on the Spiritual Life: Mark the Monk*, vols 1 and 2, trans. Tim Vivian and Augustine Casiday, Popular Patristics Series 37 (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006), 121; *Marc le Moine: Traités I*, trans. Georges-Matthieu de Durand, Sources chrétiennes 445 (Paris: Cerf, 1999), 152. The comparison is also made by Jacob of Serugh (d. 521), *Homiliae selectae* (ed. P. Bedjan, 3:880), Martyrius/Sahdona, *Book of Perfection* (ed. A. de Halleux, 1:63), and Babai, *Liber de Unione* (ed. Vaschalde, p. 288).

75 [*The need for pure prayer*]

Observe these things, my brother, and you will live the life of angels in a mortal body. This too you should be aware of, my brother, that the principal element of all good for a man of God in this world is pure prayer, and «unless» a person dies to every human being and remains continually in stillness with himself, like someone dead in a grave, he cannot acquire this in his own person, seeing that pure prayer requires emptiness from everything else, in order that by means of this he may stand chastely and without distraction before God at the time of prayer, his mind being gathered in from everywhere to itself, gazing only upon God in the stillness of its stirrings. And by the recollection of his majesty it will be made to shine out, and «God» will raise it up to the glory of his Being. By recalling his acts of grace towards the race of rational beings, it will be diffused over the earth in the wonder of joy. Then at the incomprehensibility of «God's» Being, he will be filled in his entire soul with praise, so as to be moved by holy stirrings, with fear and with love at the nature of the majesty of his Godhead—whose Being a thousand thousand spiritual beings glorify, yet are unable to look into the opaque cloud of the innermost sanctuary of his hiddenness. He it is who has brought into existence innumerable worlds and natures without limit, and who has established the creation of numberless legions of angels out of nothing; he it is who, while dwelling in his own Being when there was none to urge him—in that nothing existed—of his own accord and in his grace was pleased to will that the worlds should come into being so that they might be aware of him, and he effected the creation in his grace, even holding us human beings—who are dust from the earth, a mute nature—worthy; for, by means of his creative craftsmanship, he raised us up to the state of rationality, so that we might stand and speak in his presence in prayer, and might be made partakers in «our» intellect in that glory of the divine nature³⁵—if our way of life be worthy of it—and so that we should emulate on earth the model of the bodiless beings.

³⁵Cf. 2 Pet 1.4; 2 Peter is not part of the New Testament canon of the Church of the East; no doubt this famous verse reached Isaac by some indirect way.

76 Now because all these good things and this greatness come to us from vigilance and purity—in that vigilance is also the cause of purity—let us persevere in the midst of stillness; let us make ourselves dead from everyone; let us gather in our thoughts at every moment from distraction by means of these recollections, so that we may be able without labor at the time of the office and of prayer to bring our intellect back to ourselves, and it can be offered up to God in our concern.

77 Let us yearn for the encounter with knowledge of God by means of our continuous supplication to him; let us be desirous to receive perception of him in our souls at the time of prayer. For it is clear that, were we to be desirous and expending care over this, and had concern over what is appropriate, the good and compassionate God would not disappoint us, seeing that it is he who has given us all these good things of his own accord.

78 [*Some final sample prayers*]

I want now to set down for you a few words of prayer, and then I will bring this letter to a close. It seemed to me necessary to put these in the letter, so that they might provide you with material for prayer, and so that, by means of the tenor of the meaning in them, the mind might acquire humility, and stay away from empty distraction through the feelings of contrition they contain. And when you eat or drink, stand up or sit down, or are going to sleep, or doing something—even when you are walking on the road, or are among many people—you should be occupying yourself in the hiddenness of your heart with these words of prayer that I am writing down for you. The same applies to when you make a prostration. Once you have said the obligatory prayers and you are in need of these in your supplication, continue with the following prayers.

79 By such kinds of stirrings the mind is awakened so as to gaze on God at the time of prayer.

When you pray, attach the following to your prayer:

80 O God, make me worthy to become aware of the hope that is reserved for the righteous at your coming, when you will come again in our body to make known your glory to the two worlds.

81 O God who brought your love to the world even though it did not recognize you, and who were revealed to the righteous in part throughout all generations by means of the adumbrations of revelations, bring back to life the deadness of my stirrings, so that they become aware of you, in order that I may make haste to come to you and not pause until the hour when death sets the limit to my life's course in the haven of silence.

82 O Christ, haven of mercies, who revealed yourself in the midst of a sinful generation; for whom the righteous awaited in their several generations, and who were revealed in your own time to the joy of the entire creation: grant to me different eyes, a different sense of hearing, and a different heart, so that, instead of the world, I may see, hear, and perceive those things that are kept back by you for³⁶ the revelation of your glory to the race of Christians, by means of that sight, hearing, and perception that is outside the ordinary senses.

83 Stir up in me, Lord, the taste of the perception of you, so that I may be held worthy of passing from this world to you, seeing that the world has captivated me by its joys, taking me away from you. As long as my eyes rejoice at the sight of corruptible things, and my mind has a corporeal understanding, it is not possible for me to be completely free from the feeble feelings, subject to corruption, that arise out of them.

84 Make me worthy, Lord, to encounter that mode of vision over which corruption holds no sway, so that, on encountering it, and becoming oblivious of the world and of myself, all corporeal images may be wiped out before my eyes.

³⁶Lit. in.

85 O Christ, the delight of our *human* race, the consolation of our impoverished condition, the support of our *human* nature's low estate, seeing how it has tottered and fallen, the hope of those deprived, the honorable Name that became known among humanity: accord a rising up for my fallen condition, effect a resurrection to my deadness, cause an awareness of life to stir within me, bring my soul out of the prison of ignorance, so that I may give thanks to your name.³⁷ Blow³⁸ upon my limbs with some of the air of the New Life; visit my corrupt state in the grave, and bring me out of the place of darkness. May the dawn of your revelation visit me in the Sheol of ignorance. Human nature, endowed with speech, has grown silent in me: O Lord, stir it once again to its natural vitality, for "Sheol will not acknowledge you, nor will those who go down to the pit give praise to your name."³⁹ I have no tongue to utter that last thing, but may the living, such as I am today, give thanks to you.⁴⁰

The senses have grown dumb, the *heart's* stirrings have been silenced, thoughts have dried up, the entire operation of human nature in me is destitute of true life.

86 There is no remembrance of you in me, there is no thanksgiving to you in the Sheol where I dwell, there is no joyful sound of your praises in my soul's lost state, all my limbs that are dead are awaiting the *birth* pangs of resurrection. There is no one who comes in to me in the desolation of Sheol.

87 O my God, cause me to hear your voice that resurrects all in a hidden way, decree for me in symbol the example of Lazarus, your friend.⁴¹ I know, Lord, that I have never been seen to be a diligent friend of yours, *yet* I belong to your flock, and my enemy has taken me off and humiliated me on earth. O God, make me worthy of a share in that magnificent state that you have prepared for your

³⁷Cf. Ps 141.7.

³⁸Cf. Ezek 37.5–6, 9.

³⁹Ps 6.5.

⁴⁰Cf. Ps 113.26 (Pesh. 114.26; 115.18), for "the living," see LXX.

⁴¹Cf. Jn 11.11.

friends in the New World, and likewise, of an awareness of the knowledge of your love, and the inseparable union, and the indissoluble bond of the delight that comes from gazing upon you.

88 O Lord, do not withhold from me your acts of grace; may I not be deprived of the knowledge of you that is filled with hope.

89 O Lord, save me from darkness of soul.

90 O compassionate Christ, give me joy in your hope: sow your hope in my thoughts, and make me worthy of your compassion when the revelation of you shines out from heaven. O Lord, may I not be required for the judgement of my wrongdoings when you come in your glory.

91 In your grace, Lord, you brought me into being, and in your grace you will hold my body worthy of resurrection; may my rising from the dust not be for judgement and shamefacedness.

92 May I not be awakened from the sleep of death to endure judgement and deprivation of you; rather, awaken me from the dust to delight, O Lord, and to that glorious state to which your will was intending to bring created rational beings from the very beginning, when you fashioned them.

You did not create me, Lord, for Gehenna's use: may I not become a vessel destined for perdition: perdition is for someone to be deprived of the utterly joy-giving vision of you, O Lord.

93 Hold me worthy, Lord, of discovering the explanation of that hope for which you fashioned me in your will from the very beginning, so that I may behold your eternal glory; for it is you who—even before we came into being—wished in your love that creation should come into being so as to become aware of you.

94 [*Final observations*]

These are the things you should make supplication for in your prayer, and these are the subjects with which you should be occupied

at the time of your request. Be moved with longing and suffering, make supplication fervently, make your heart fervent with stirrings such as these in your prayer, until love of God bursts into flame in you, and the heated passion of love of him is aroused in your heart.

95 With converse such as this the mind is contracted into itself in delight, and little by little it forgets distraction, is swallowed up in insights, and is liberated from images. Such a person feels suffering in his prayer, and suffering intermingled with faith is shed over his mind, while his heart rejoices in God, leaping with joy and exulting with love: it is filled with hope, and awakened from a state of sleep. At the time of prayer the soul stands in great delight at this converse that belongs to the prayer of understanding.

96 As for the magnificent stirrings that are born in a person at the time of supplication, this happens as a result of abundant yearning, much meditation of the mind, and the continual converse of prayer that accompanies a person everywhere in his reflection and his occupation with a particular goal of supplication.

End of the Letter.

Chapter 2

Next, by the same, the blessed Mar Isaac.
What is the sign that rays of «our» rational
nature have begun to be seen in the soul.

1 The manifestation of the distinctive characteristics of rationality consists in the continual praise of God in rational beings. Likewise, in the case of the soul's created state—which is so wondrous in its nature—«the soul» was created by its Good Fashioner for no other purpose except only so that it might take delight in knowledge of the divine glory, just as the invisible hosts—which are kindred to the soul—exist in a continual state of delight at the glory of that glorious Being.

2 Thus the soul that is continually occupied with divine praises exists in its natural created state: it was for this very purpose that «God» brought creation into being—namely, so that it might know him and praise him, and thus be raised up to delight in the eternal glory of him who cannot be described or comprehended by anyone. For the glory of the divine nature is revealed to the soul by means of the continual converse of the praise of God.

3 The creation of this world, with its many different aspects, also came into being for this same purpose—namely, so that the glory of God might become known to the mind of rational beings—and not just for the purpose of eating, drinking, and marrying, even though this may seem to be the case to many people in their ignorance.

4 Now God was perfectly able to establish all human beings in the same way as the spiritual beings, in an abode that did not need a succession of generations, one from another, and like these same beings, without any need to make use of the elements in the process of their growth. But this is clear: the purpose of this created world is not the same as that of the spiritual beings, in that human beings are not left with the very same things for eternity, in that all these things that are considered pleasant and glorious in this world, will become inoperative, and God is going to establish human beings in another mode of life, and by this the purpose for which God first of all wished to guide creation in this state will be made known to the world. The purpose was not to give special honor to the animal level of existence; after all these aspects are disdained by many even here on earth. Rather, the all-wise God first of all provided this visible creation so that human and other rational beings should begin, as a result of these visible things, to draw near to knowledge of that glorious Nature.

5 For it is inappropriate for a person who is transmitting knowledge to pupils to bring the students at the very beginning to complete knowledge of the subject, without having first exercised them thoroughly in the letters of the alphabet and in reading aloud. It is also extremely bad that lofty matters should be set out before lowly topics have been worked through. Again, if a man should want to invite many people to a meal, he first of all brings to our sight the inferior preparations, using the inferior dishes, then gradually he produces the dishes that are splendid to look at and whose preparation is a matter of wonder.

In this way God too, the Lord of all, has brought out into the open the might of his wisdom and his love in the contents of this visible world, which is indescribably inferior to what is going to become visible subsequently, for he has reserved for the last that glorious state of felicity and the wondrous sight of that astonishing

world, which has been prepared by his immense might and vast love so as to be brought out into the open.

6 Accordingly, as I have said above, when—as a result of continual converse with him—the soul is moved to enjoyment of the «divine» glory, and is pleased to remain there unceasingly, it has become aware, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, of the very condition in which, at the end, it will be clothed, having achieved this already here in pledge, in so far as the bounds of human nature allow, and having been held worthy of the mode of life of freedom, and tasting it as it were in pledge.

Chapter 3

[Four Sets of Kephalaia on Spiritual Knowledge]

Again, by the same Mar Isaac, bishop and solitary: various headings on knowledge, in which there are exalted contemplations, perfect knowledge, abundant and wonderful insights, and vast mysteries. They are useful for the joy and delight of the soul, and for its growth in spiritual matters.

1.1 God is truly Father to the rational beings whom he has begotten in his care so as to become inheritors of his glory in the time to come, in order to manifest to them his richness, to their unending delight.

1.2 «Divine» Reality «or: Truth» is hidden in itself from all that is created, and at a very long distance this side of it there dwell the rational beings who came into existence because of it. At a time that is right, as it pleases «God», some of this «divine» Reality will be revealed to them, but not in its full extent, for its full extent is hidden in his Being.

Elucidation: By “Reality” you should understand the exact knowledge concerning the nature of the «divine» Being. If, in the case of «the sources of knowledge» here, they are all mysteries¹ of what is to come, then, even if we speak of these «sources of knowledge» as angels, the Reality «lying behind» their symbols is still guarded from all in silence.

¹Or: symbols.

1.3 Every utterance, in its being spoken concerning anything that exists, is spoken on three levels: as that thing is, or beyond what it is, or less than what it is.² When it concerns God, however, there is only one meaning to the utterance, or way of thinking about him: beyond that limit it is not permitted that the understanding of any created being should stir, apart from turning backwards again, clothed in awe and hesitation.

1.4 In the case of the essential vision of those who are previously practiced in knowledge of the Six Days of Creation, the exact insights concerning them that *occur* in the natural condition of the intellect are called “stirrings.” The individual instances of these³ *are*, without *real* existence: a perceptible demonstration, which serves the will of the Lord, is *provided* by the sending out of Paul.⁴

1.5 In the case of the four excellent altered states that *can* come over rational *human* nature, we can find the *following* distinction between them:⁵

- the first altered state is *to be found* in the person who is aroused from a contemptible way of life;
- the second altered state is *to be found* in the person who *is* aroused, from error of intellect to a perception of Reality in secondary beings;
- the third altered state is *to be found* in the person who *is* aroused, from the previous level, by means of spiritual insights, to the stirrings of his natural created state;
- the fourth altered state is *to be found* in the state of being stirred that belongs to eternal life, in accordance with the gospel’s contemplation.

²Compare Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 2.31; also Mark the Monk, *Justified by Works* 83 (PPS 37:122; SC 445:154).

³Margin adds: which occur with our saint in the form of dreams and visions.

⁴Acts 16.9.

⁵Based on Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 2.4.

1.6 Those who are advanced in honor, have advanced in *their* altered state, and those who have advanced in *their* altered state, have guided *the course of that* altered state. Therefore greater is the *sense of* oppression for beginners than for those who have received honor.⁶

1.7 The “call” of *different* times runs *hand in hand*, with stirrings involving corporeal beings. Where there are no bodies, there are not altered states either; where there are no altered states, nor are there any times; where there are no times, there are none embodied; where there are none embodied, nor are there beings above and below *having* a single individuality, but in each single individual *there is* an equality, like the equality of individuals in substances that are not united. Conversely, if there is no equality of distinctions there *that applies* also to shapes and colors, and by *means* of these the contemplation of the entire chapter should proceed.

1.8 Rational natures have first learned from the Creator himself the use of the perceptible sound of speech. The first use of it was the glory that was offered to the Creator by those who had been made, as is written in Job.⁷ We human beings, too, have perceptibly received from the Creator the use of the sounds of perceptible speech, and it is transmitted to us, from fathers to their children.

1.9 Those who say that in this world the vision of our Savior *takes place*, in a different way from that which *occurs* in contemplation, are companions of those who say that in the world to come the enjoyment of his kingdom *occurs* perceptibly, and *that there will be*, a use of the elements and *there will exist* a solid *nature* of individuals. Both have slipped away from the truth.⁸

⁶Sense not entirely clear: there is probably a word play: the verb *yqr* has the literal sense of “to be heavy.” Thus those who are “weighty/honored,” because they have learned to have more self-control, are not weighed down by the “oppression” felt by those entering on the ascetic life (cf. K1.79).

⁷Job 38.7 (Peshitta and LXX).

⁸Marginal note: “Pay attention to this Heading and its words.”

1.10 In his likeness will his brothers and sisters also become, whether those on the right or those on the left, apart from the different rankings in glory. In his likeness, then, they are raised up from earthly forms to a form that is most glorious—without the body being rejected, in that it has, rather, been honored as a result of the change it has undergone, for it is more exalted than was the case in its prior form. Evagrius is a faithful witness of the matter: “If the human body is part of this world, but the form of this world passes away, it is clear that the present form of the body will pass away.”⁹

1.11 In the case of those who, through the free choice of their way of life, have been held worthy to become children to God because of the excellence of their will and their eagerness, the grace that provides for our salvation provides feelings¹⁰ in their hearts concerning God, like feelings towards their father. And in the case of those who are servants in their practice, these feelings are like ones for a master; and in the case of those who are alien to him by means of their various actions, then grace stirs up in them, in response to God’s majesty, feelings like those for a judge. Look how the gospel, full of life, also sets out three rankings with respect to God: in some places it designates him “Father,” in others “Master of the household,” and in others it names him “King” and “Judge.”

1.12 A person is illumined in accordance with how good his way of life is with respect to God. And insofar as he is drawn up towards knowledge, he approaches freedom of soul; and insofar as he approaches freedom of mind, he is drawn up from one kind of knowledge to a knowledge that is even higher than that.

1.13 The non-intellectual light is the light that belongs to the elements. Now in the New World a new kind of light shines out, and there is no need for the use of anything perceptible or belonging to the elements. Intellectual light is the mind illumined with divine

⁹An exact quotation of Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 1.26 (both Syriac versions).

¹⁰Lit. stirrings.

knowledge, which is poured out without measure upon the natural world. In the spiritual world *there is* a spiritual light. That *former* darkness does not resemble this *spiritual darkness*, nor does that *former* light resemble this light.

1.14 Do not dispute over truth with someone who does not know truth; but from the person who is eager to know *truth*, do not conceal words from him.

1.15 With someone who is unable to profit from knowledge, benefit him *instead* with your silence, rather than with words of knowledge: lower yourself to join him, in accordance with his weakness. As in the case of a bird, speak with him in a language that resembles him, so that by means of knowledge you may capture him for salvation.

1.16 With a person who is not arguing against truth out of stubbornness, and does not speak evil out of wickedness, but is *simply* babbling *in* ignorance, do not be at all provoked by his words, but simply let them enter the gate of your ears as if *they were* the lisping utterances of children.

1.17 After the transgression, God was revealed to human beings as a Judge; but at the intermediary revelations, as a Master—as in the case of Noah, Abraham, and those who followed him, *for Scripture speaks of* “my servant Abraham,”¹¹ and “my servant Moses.”¹² But from the time of the advent of Christ onwards *there have been* revelations that indicate the ranking of *God’s* Fatherhood, how he is Father in truth, and he does not possess in his dealings with us the *sort of* will that is associated with ownership or judging.

1.18 It is appropriate that we say “Alas for ourselves, what contemplation do we deprive ourselves of as a result of our own laxity!”

¹¹Gen 26.24

¹²Num 12.8.

1.19 Alas for us, for we are unaware of what intention our Maker has for us, and of the magnificent state of which he is going to hold us worthy. Instead, we occupy ourselves with earthly things and their rottenness. We ought to be drunk with hope, and we should continually have in mind the great and wonderful abode that will be ours: we should travel there in our thoughts at every moment, to the place where our Maker is going to make us finally dwell, «when» our abode will be in heaven, and we will become heavenly beings, «enjoying» that life that has no further limit or change, to the place that God has prepared for our sakes for this very purpose, and it is in Christ that he has sown in us the hope of it.

As the blessed Interpreter said in the section on the firmament,¹³ “At the present time, then, while we are in this «present» state, we dwell in this place—that is, within this visible sky and earth, but in the state that is to come, when we shall be not subject to corruption and aberration «any longer», we shall all reside in heaven where our Lord Christ is: he who was taken from us, and for our sakes is now in heaven, and it is he who also showed «us» our abode there.”

1.20 Do not consider that a long period of time spent in worship before God is wasted; likewise with psalmody, which is also important: there is no activity more important than this among all the virtues that are practiced by human beings. And why do I speak of virtues, seeing that this «activity» is dead to «the thought of» virtue as a result of being constantly with God: it is a sign of being dead to the world, and it is the path to real repentance, as the Interpreter says. It is keeping body and mind humble, getting rid of evil thoughts, the dissolution of desires, the soul's preparation to make a complete departure from the body in symbol, a great yearning for the love of God, and all the good things, both here and those to come, are to be found in it.

This work should not seem insignificant in your eyes, if you are able to bring it to perfection without ceasing, by renouncing

¹³Theodore of Mopsuestia, perhaps from his commentary on Genesis.

everything, including yourself, and by being constant in *«this work alone, «then»* your bliss will be indescribable by earthly tongue. If you give yourself over to this, and to what will encounter you—I am speaking of things that are ineffable and more wonderful than *«one can imagine»* here—then this truly is complete departure from the world, or rather, from a way of life subject to corruptibility; it is the sum of all labors, comprising all the commandments, the fulfilment of every virtue.

1.21 “You are a priest for eternity.”¹⁴ “For eternity,” in that Christ our Lord acts as priest now too, fulfilling the task of priesthood in order to bring forgiveness on our behalf. This he does continually, until he has raised us all up to himself; only then will there no longer be need for him to serve as priest on our behalf in sacrifices that bring reconciliation, aimed at the perfection that the whole of *«human»* nature will receive through him. He pours upon us the gifts of the Father abundantly, for sacrifices and prayers *«are needed»* where there is sin and deviation.

Elucidation: This heading belongs to the following one, and it confirms the spiritual meaning of the latter.

1.22 The priesthood of Christ consists in his offering prayer to the divine nature that resides in him on behalf of the entire nature of rational beings. Now if he did this earnestly while he was residing on earth—as is apparent from many places in the gospel—all the more now does he do this, as the Apostle testifies: “He has entered so as to appear on our behalf before the face of God.”¹⁵ Understand by “on our behalf” *«to mean»* “he has ascended first, on behalf of us all, and sat at the right hand of God”; and he supplicates on behalf of us—not just on behalf of human beings, but also on behalf of the holy angels—for with his soul, the holy angels share in an affinity with him. We *«however»* have an extra part in him, in that we have a share in him in both respects, in both soul and in body. It was not to

¹⁴Heb 5.6.

¹⁵Heb 9.11, 24.

no purpose that God took the "First-fruits" from us, and raised him up ahead of time to heaven, seating him with him on the right hand. For through him he is going to give us good things, for the knowledge of which at present the bodily senses and the soul's impulses are useless; for God reveals these things in the spirit to the person in whom he takes pleasure.

Elucidation: It is not by offering prayer in words, but he perfects everything authoritatively by action, in place of *ṣ*vocal*ḥ* prayer. From Evagrius: "He is the High Priest who makes supplication to God on behalf of all rational natures, separating them, by his mediation, from evil and ignorance."¹⁶

1.23 On no occasion after sating the belly will some trial of the thoughts fail to approach us, along with stirrings of the *ḥ*body's*ḥ* members. Therefore, beware of this, as it is written,¹⁷ lest you forget the Lord and perform some evil act. For it is through the confusion of thinking that comes upon you all of a sudden as a result of the belly's *ṣ*satiety*ḥ*, that the mind can easily go astray, attaching itself to odious acts. Let us not deceive ourselves: perfection does not come by means of the belly. Contempt follows on from satiety, by means of the various causes of shame that spring up against us from within us. *Ḥ*Belonging*ḥ* to emptiness, however, are watchfulness and wariness. But *ḥ*this*ḥ* alertness does not just apply to the body, but also to the mind.

1.24 A vigil *ṣ*spent*ḥ* in contemplation frees the intellect from *ḥ*false*ḥ* opinions concerning God, and confirms it in the delight of firm conviction.

1.25 Those who merely grasp at knowledge are themselves grasped by pride: the more they study, the more darkened they become. But in the case of those whom knowledge enters and resides in their very stirrings, these people lower themselves to the depths of humility,

¹⁶Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 5.46 (common Syriac version).

¹⁷Cf. Deut 6.12, 8.11.

and they receive in themselves in a luminous way the conviction that gives joy.¹⁸

1.26 Those who rush at knowledge without working *for it* are the ones who grab at it; in other words, instead of truth, they grab at a semblance. *Knowledge* resides of its own accord in the stirrings of those who have become crucified during their lifetime,¹⁹ and who breathe life from the very midst of death.

1.27 Corresponding to a change of way of life, thoughts concerning the properties of God are changed in the stirrings of human beings. When their way of life is degraded for the worse, people consider harsh things with respect to the Lord of all. This is effected by grace, which knows how to provide sustenance for every temperament. "Luxury is not appropriate for a fool," as Solomon said,²⁰ nor should a servant be put in authority over important matters. Those who are raised up to excellence in *their* way of life discover the properties of God to be gentle. "No stranger or uncircumcised should eat of the mystery of the Passover."²¹

1.28 In the case of someone who has completed the body's labors and has approached old age, his body still remaining *fit*, vigil consisting in contemplation, combined with a way of life *that comes from* knowledge will bring *that person* close to the spirit's way of life—he is cut off from it only by *his* human condition—and to a wakefulness and alertness of intellect; and there will apply to him continually the words, "Night shall be light like the day."²² In this mode of life there is a certain need to be alert against experiencing blasphemy. Provided humility is to be found with such a person, he will easily be freed *from this* by means of the light of faith that will arise for him through grace. But if he is continually involved in dis-

¹⁸Cf. Col 2.2.

¹⁹Cf. Gal 6.14.

²⁰Prov 19.10.

²¹Cf. Ex 12.43, 48.

²²Cf. Ps 138.12.

traction and conversation, his contemplation will become darkened, and he will go astray in his intellect, being tempted by blasphemy when he approaches this mode of life. For rest does not harm it²³ in the way that conversation and distraction of the senses do.

1.29 The light of contemplation proceeds along with continual stillness and deprivation of outward impressions. For when the mind is empty, it stands continuously in expectation, *waiting to see* what contemplation will dawn for it. Whoever disputes concerning this, not only leads others astray, but he himself has turned aside from the path without being aware of it: he is chasing after a shadow in the imaginations of his intellect!

1.30 Whenever it is a time of battling *with Satan* and of darkness, even if this should be in the form of distraction, one should spend extra time in prayer and in kneeling on the ground. But when it is not a case of persistent battling or of downcast darkness, but the normal chance distraction that affects the thoughts, *then* let the proportion of reading *Scripture* be greater than the time spent in prayer. However, one should combine the two—take some medicine from Scripture, and then approach prayer.

1.31 In the case of those who give themselves over to satiety in eating, it is a matter of wonder if they are able to preserve modesty without its resplendence being disturbed, let alone to give their mind over to divine stirrings. So then I suppose it is not a body in which they are clothed, and the humors and their *various* combinations are not playing their role in these people's frame, but instead they are clothed in some spiritual frame. You should hold fast to the following unshakeable thought: that when there is satiety it is not possible to keep control over the body in what you do, or over the sweet impulses that put the intellect in a state of confusion, it not being a matter of your will whether or not it is stirred by them, nor *is it possible* for you to change the baseness of its stirrings into

²³I.e., contemplation.

something that is altered for the better. In the case of thoughts, we have the authority to bridle them—that is, if we are extremely alert. But over *the body's* functioning we do not have authority. Accordingly, anyone who says that he is without any passion as he fills his belly or is continuously involved in outward *material* spectacles, has gone completely astray.

1.32 Purity consists in the wiping out of memories through the mind's being filled with abundant contemplations; even so, the *mind* does not remain without any experience of stirrings—if this were not so, *such a person* would be without a body. For *being in the body* he is subject to being tempted, but not in a way so as to be enslaved. It is not a matter of fighting against them, but of despising them: such a person is someone victorious, but not *any longer* at that time a fighter. Incitements indeed come insistently, but they do not stay long in the memory, and formless impulses concerning bodily things float away. Darkness may occur sometimes, but not struggle: this is prevented by the luminosity of *that person's* ministry.

1.33 Impassibility does not consist in being unaware of the passions, but in not accepting the passions, because of the mind's being inebriated through the glory of the soul.

1.34 Let the following prayer not cease from your heart night or day: "O Lord, save me from darkness of soul." For this sums up all prayer that *comes from* knowledge. A darkened soul is a second Sheol, whereas an illumined mind is a companion to the seraphim.

1.35 Blessed is the person whose heart has been opened up and who has become aware of what God intends to perform with regard to the race of rational beings. It is a matter of wonder how the spiritual natures can endure this joy, for they know exactly what this hope consists of, and the place to which they and we are invited.

1.36 For someone to say to his brother “Love God” is very easy, but what is necessary is to know how to love *him*. Out of a stillness that is not confused, and a sincere²⁴ ministry performed in humility, there is born in the heart the ministry *on the level of the soul*; this is what they describe as “the hidden mode of life lived in the mind.”²⁵ It consists in much meditation on the hidden things to which stillness gives birth in the soul. The different kinds of this are dealt with by me in the section explaining the rankings of the *different* modes of life. Its initial seed consists in the suffering of the heart that is carried on into joy. The ministry of the soul brings us close to the spiritual mode of life that consists in wonder at God; for it is the perception of his mysteries that causes amazement to the soul, and its stirrings are, as it were, “baptized in the dark cloud.”²⁶ If one were to speak using typology, it is like the cloud that covered Moses, and he was baptized in its midst out of the world. All that occurred there in the Old Testament perceptibly, happens here in a spiritual manner. From here we also have affirmed in us faith in supplication, and this faith leaves fire in a person from tip to toe.²⁷ As for love, it is the might of this fire, which calls out to the soul at every moment, reminding it to depart from earthly things and to wander in its stirrings in God.

1.37 The spiritual mode of life is ministry without the senses. Ministry without the senses is the mind when it is associated with God in the revelation of his mysteries. According to the words of the fathers, this is what they describe as “the naked intellect,”²⁸ and sometimes they call it “the vision loftier than the body,”²⁹ as in the words, “Then he sees in himself the light of the beauty of his soul,”³⁰

²⁴Lit. openness of.

²⁵The terminology suggests Isaac has John of Apamea in mind; cf. John, *On the Soul* (ed. Dederling, p. 66; trans. Hansbury, p. 138).

²⁶Cf. 1 Cor 10.2.

²⁷Lit. “from his brain to his *toe* nails.”

²⁸Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 3.6, 19, 21, 70.

²⁹Source not identified.

³⁰Evagrius, *Kephalaia* *Supplement* 50.

and at the time of prayer he sees in himself heavenly visions”—that is, he sees in his soul the glory of God, which consists in the vision of his mysteries.

1.38 “The vision of the glory of God”:³¹ he is speaking about the fact that an insight concerning the majesty of his nature is stirred in him, and when he becomes aware of this, it takes him out of this world, and from then on he is assured concerning that hope that is to come. This is the “persuasion of mind” of which Paul spoke.³²

1.39 In this way the good is placed in the soul’s nature, like the fire that is placed in the natural state of stones and iron: it needs something to set it in motion, and this is the grace of God and the effort of the human person. What exists naturally and unchangeably in stones and iron, exists in us in the unbound and free volition that is not tied down by necessity.

1.40 Until someone becomes afraid and is thus held back from evil, the desire of what is good will not even stir in him in a sweet and warm way.

1.41 Those who come upon this book and see the individual headings on knowledge written above the lines in various places in the book, should not imagine that this was done by mistake, in that these headings on knowledge serve as a kind of gloss on much of what is said in this book. For this *present* book has been made by us for the insight and greater ease of the reader—and also as a reminder for ourselves. Some of the topics of the contemplation of the Scriptures I have marked down as it were as the head of the book; also a few experiences that have come my way. For each subject we have marked down above them some of these chapters on knowledge, so that by them the mind may be illumined in any obscure meanings *that occur* in the reading. For there are words, each one of which

³¹Source not identified.

³²Cf. Col 2.2; 1 Thess 1.5.

indicates a different sense when it is read, «but» inside it is different in sense.

Each one of these chapters on knowledge is marked above the lines in the First Part.³³

1.42 Prayer that is deprived of contemplation is full of listlessness, and «this» can only be turned aside with difficulty. This occurs because of a dense darkness, which in turn results from much distraction of the senses, leading to distraction of the intellect, and from that point on a thick darkness bursts out in the mind. «By contrast», the person who prays together with contemplation, resides in luxury, and he prays gladly, remaining in prayer without any struggle.

1.43 Just as awareness of the Father is «experienced» as in a mirror by the holy angels, so it is with awareness of Christ in human beings.

1.44 The person who delights in the contemplation of the properties of Christ during his dwelling in stillness has received the kingdom to come in pledge as a heritage «already» here «on earth».

1.45 Ease blinds a person so that he does not gaze upon divine matters with wonder; instead, he scrutinizes them with an empty search.

1.46 Wonder of mind follows on from a solitary abode, for without the distraction «which comes» from «external» necessities and labors, it arouses, through the wisdom to which it gives birth in the mind, fervent and wondrous stirrings.

1.47 What watering is to plants, exactly the same is continual silence for the growth of knowledge.

1.48 Speech is to wisdom what nakedness is to chaste limbs.

1.49 The Lord, Christ, is both First-Born and Only-Begotten. These «terms» do not exist in a singleness of nature, for “First-Born” «implies»

³³No traces seem to have been left of this in the surviving manuscripts of the First Part.

many brothers, whereas “Only-Begotten” implies, none other being born either before or after him. The two names are assured in the God and the Man who were united in a single Person, without what belongs to each, nature being confused because of the union.

1.50 When, in the course of all our paths our mind wanders and is buffeted by reason of the threats in the Scriptures, at the punishment for our sins, we have no other refuge from our terror apart from the words, “We being sinners, God was reconciled with us by the death of his Son.”³⁴ God sent his Only-begotten Son at a time when there was not even any trace of religious feeling: “I was found by those who had not sought me, and I was sought by those who had not asked concerning me.”³⁵

1.51 The words, “Your judgments are like the great deep,”³⁶ have the same meaning as “a cloud beneath his feet.”³⁷ “Beneath his feet” is understood with reference to things that are beyond him: for they are inscrutable—namely, contemplation of the judgment and of the care of God, and his dispensation with rational beings.

1.52 The “noetic cloud”³⁸ is the intellect that is smitten with wonder at the spiritual insight that all of a sudden falls upon the soul, and without any movement, establishes the intellect in a state where all visible things are hidden from it in a state of non-awareness and non-perception of the target of meditation on them, and the mind remains still, like a cloud that surrounds these matters and deters any bodily vision.

1.53 A true penitent is a living martyr. Tears win over blood by the effects they produce, and thus, repentance wins over martyrdom. Tears win, crowns first, before the blood of martyrdom: the latter

³⁴Cf. Rom 5.8, 10.

³⁵Is 65.1.

³⁶Ps 35.6.

³⁷Ps 17.9.

³⁸Cf. Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 5.16 (based on Ex 20.11); “noetic” is the reading there of S2, whereas S1, the standard version, has “spiritual.”

receives crowns along with *humanity*, in general, whereas the former *receive* it before everyone else. The true penitent, then, is to be seen with a double crown.

1.54 The aim of psalmody should be serene conversation with God by means of calm and unperturbed supplication. Let us not multiply recitation *of Psalms*, *in the way*, that crazy people do, while wandering about in our thoughts on refuse heaps, and going out from here empty of benefits, *goods which*, the discerning intellect is wont to amass at these times.

1.55 Do you wish *merely*, to adorn your body by means of a laborious standing *during the recitation of Psalms*, or, maybe, do you *also* seek to make your soul pleasing? *If the latter*, utter *just* five words with understanding,³⁹ and go out from there inebriated. But if your aim is directed to extra standing, it is possible *to achieve this*, even when the tongue is still. Let us *indeed* extend standing in long drawn-out vigil, without holding back on recitation, but *in this case* prior to this a heart *endowed* with insight *is required*,⁴⁰ because of the great *sense of* rest *given by* the verses.

1.56 All knowledge is divided up into two parts: the part involving the senses, and the part involving the mind.⁴¹ The first *part* is called "action" [*praxis*], which consists of virtue; and the second, "contemplation." Furthermore, the first part is subdivided into two other parts, action concerned with the material, and that concerned with the immaterial. That concerned with the material is accomplished involving other persons; that concerned with the immaterial, a person accomplishes in his own person.

1.57 Examples of the material part: ministry with the sick, the reception of strangers, washing *the feet of* the exhausted, giving of alms to the needy, words of comfort to anyone who is in grief or troubled

³⁹1 Cor 14.19.

⁴⁰Translation and sense uncertain: another possible translation might be "now the heart anticipates (the tongue) in insight"; see also the Textual Notes.

⁴¹Compare Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 2.63.

in heart, teaching that is useful for the growth of our companions' spiritual life, along with everything else by which the love of one's neighbor is fulfilled in accordance with the will of God.

1.58 Examples of the active part that is concerned with the immaterial—and it is not possible for anyone to carry out this outside one's self—are: chastity, fasting, weeping, reading of Scripture, the liturgical office, stillness, prayer, along with similar things.

Now the first part is called "the half part," while the second, "the supreme part"—that is, because it comprises the entire active part.

The material part is not capable of freeing the mind from the materiality of the thoughts, which consists in stirring subject to the passions.

Whereas the second part purifies the soul from material emotions and brings a person towards that greater part,⁴² designated "contemplation." For this reason, true solitaries continually strive to cultivate virtue by means of this immaterial part, so that, when they manage to become purified by means of it, they may be raised up easily from thoughts of the material world to contemplation.

1.59 There is a partial kind of prayer, and one that is all-encompassing. The all-encompassing kind is like "May your will be done,"⁴³ while the partial kind is like "and concerning this I have asked of my Lord three times."⁴⁴ But because we have an enemy, and we are also clothed in a nature that is in need of many things, and a soul that is subject to aberration, we are not able continually to be capable of the all-encompassing kind; and even though the perfect for the most part persevere in it, we nevertheless see that even for the saints there were different kinds in prayer—as in the case of the blessed Paul and the rest of the apostles. For this reason the Psalms of David were set down by the fathers for use in the Church seeing that they contain different kinds of prayers. Accordingly, as a foundation of

⁴²Cf. Lk 10.42 ("better part").

⁴³Mt 6.10 (cf. K1.80 below).

⁴⁴2 Cor 12.8.

our spiritual life we appoint at the beginning of our requests at all the fixed Hours that prayer that was handed down to us by our Savior; and after it, the prayers that the Spirit composed for our instruction and enjoyment through the mouth of the blessed Prophet David,—namely, his psalmody. After them, for the rest of the other Hours, we provide our own prayers, according to what our human nature indicates to us, corresponding to its sick state that compels us to ask things of the Maker concerning this condition.

Now specified prayer assists the sick state and feebleness of the mind, also when human nature is infirm. Whereas at the times when the mind is healthy and standing in an exalted level, it entrusts its will to God.

1.60 Just as the organ of hearing is unable to take in speech without its being composed in a vocal utterance, so the mind is not able to converse with the passions within it without material things.

1.61 Just as the nature of demons manifests itself to human eyes without taking on the forms of the senses in which we are clothed, so it is impossible for it to stir up thoughts about it within the heart and cause the mind to look in their direction without the help of hallucinations of the senses and of objects.

1.62 The aim of contemplation of the world to come is to be seen in the coming into being of the holy angels—I am being bold—a situation where we are all going to become gods by the grace of our Creator, for that is his intention from the beginning, to bring the entire creation of rational beings to a single even state, without there being any distinction between them and the angels, either in a doubled state, or in simple state,⁴⁵ without the natural human body being treated unfairly: such matters from this point on do not come any more under investigation.

1.63 In the case of many people, when they have knelt down and they have pure prayer that is full of feeling, they then cut off these

⁴⁵I.e., body and soul, and angels.

stirrings of theirs and make an end to the *period of kneeling* that is full of profitable prayers; *this is so because* they imagine that they have neglected psalmody or the desire for reading *the Scripture*, because of the great deal of time spent in that great task of whose profit they are not *properly* aware. And these astonishing people do not realize that we make use of the Psalms and of reading *precisely* for this reason, so that through the recitation and meditation on them the mind might become purified from distraction, and become stirred in a luminous way in prayer, which is conversation with God—*a kind of prayer* for the sake of which *we undertake* all those *other things*.

1.64 Faith is a stirring full of conviction that springs up in the mind as a result of the grace of God. It concerns things that it is not permitted to entrust to writing and paper,⁴⁶ whereas the believing mind is permitted to know. It is *a stirring* revealed to the healthy, whereas to someone infirm, whose food is vegetables, the sustenance of the healthy is not given.

1.65 Prostrate yourself before God, so that he may cause you to taste the enjoyment that the ascetics receive at the time of the office and of prayer: they are aware of the post-resurrection life to come for the righteous, *when* their intellect is extended by *means of* the stillness that falls upon them at the time of prayer, coming from God, *quite* separate from any volition, or free will, or conception of human nature. This takes place, not only at night, but also during daytime, during the stance of prayer, when intellects that have been made radiant by guarding stillness are wrapped in that glory that is to come.

1.66 Strengthen your mind during the office by means of the radiance in which it is wrapped as a result of the flame that reading⁴⁷ causes to burn in it.

⁴⁶Compare 2 Cor 12.4.

⁴⁷I.e., *lectio divina*.

1.67 Meditate gladly on the Scriptures, which provide indications concerning the purpose of God's creative activity, and draw your intellect towards a state of wonder during the times of prayer.

Elucidation: Corresponding to different stages admonition concerning the reading of Scripture is given by the teachers of religious life. Where the level of perfection is being spoken of, it is fine that the solitary should have as reading any book that enhances this goal. But where the solitary is in need of virtuous conduct and struggles with the passions, it is not appropriate for him to read anything outside the writings of the solitary fathers.

1.68 A double spiritual meaning can be seen by us in the insight concerning the spiritual natures.⁴⁸ For the spiritual meaning attained by us that is hidden in the mystery of the moment of their coming into being is different from the spiritual meaning that is hinted at by their conduct and the natural charisms that they have received from the Maker. For the former indicates concerning the mystery of the creation of the universal resurrection—in what manner that mysterious matter of the resurrection will be accomplished and with what lightning speed, whereas the latter indicates in a hinting way concerning the new mode of existence in which rational beings will find themselves in that life after the resurrection, for which the Creator is going to hold them worthy in that place of spiritual existence, as is appropriate for his vast grace, his purpose being, so that, from each one of the spiritual insights, the mysteries of the New World that these blessed essences bear may be made dimly known to us. For by these mysteries the Creator has been pleased to make known to us—hinting beforehand from the very beginning of this world—the things that have been prepared by him to effect at the end with respect to creation: this concerns the excellence of the second coming into being that creation will receive, and in

⁴⁸I.e., angels.

what manner its entry into that state will take place, and its mode of existence *there*.

1.69 A lover of *ascetic* labors is not *merely* the person who does not love the body's ease, but someone who does not love the body's habits.

1.70 Now when the passions that are in the soul have become weakened and become silent through stillness, *then* a person can also easily control the body's desires.

1.71 Not everyone who is deficient in *ascetic* labors is a lover of ease, nor *necessarily* is everyone who vigorously makes use of *ascetic* labors a lover of *such* labors. *For* there may be someone who is deficient in ascetic labors but whose soul is filled with mourning, and *so*, he makes up, through labors of the heart, for these labors that he has withheld from the body by reason of its feebleness: through constant *attention to* his soul he bridles his thoughts, so that the passions of the body do not assault him through the senses.

And there may also be someone who labors vigorously, in accordance with the strength infused in his *physical* body, but every now and then rewards his labors with the subsequent relaxation of the body's ease. *Thus* by wandering hither and thither, nothing advantageous is recognized in him as a result of his fatigue: on the one hand, because of his labors at various times, pride will increase in him, while on the other hand, because of the relaxation of his body, anger and the lusts of the body *will likewise do so*.

1.72 For someone who works rightly, the aim of labors is to effect that the intellect be impregnable to the passions, and to ensure its healthy state of not being stirred *by them*. The aim, with respect to knowledge, is to bring the intellect close to the gift of the divine vision, which is the final *goal* of contemplation.

1.73 Once the enemy has seen how the solitary's soul is all prepared and given over to the contest against him, making light of the devil in everything by its unassailability, then he devises a means to tie up that person's mind with lay people on all sorts of pretexts; for he does not know how to prepare any trap greater than this. From here onwards, without any delay, whenever he wants he can easily enslave the solitary with the three major passions—the passion of fornication, that of envy, and that of anger. When the solitary has been forestalled, in that he is already bound hand and foot, he continually lapses and is thrown down by one of these, and it is superfluous in his mind to take care once more of proper conduct or purity of prayer.

1.74 A lover of praise is not someone who, when he is praised, is pleased with the praise, but the person who devises means to achieve this.

1.75 A person humble in mind is someone whose mind, even if he is justly praised, takes no pleasure at it.

1.76 The mental awareness of grace is revealed in the mental task of repentance.

1.77 The mental task of repentance is the lamenting of the hidden person that is poured out in the heart at the realization of the love of his Father, and not out of the terror of punishment. Occupied with continual meditation on God, in the mind's hidden supplication, which bears the suffering as a sacrificial offering, he pleases God at every moment.

1.78 The mental perception of the intellect that is advanced in the practice of stillness is the delight tasted in the heart of the joy-bearing hope that bursts forth from within the mourning, concerning the love that has been pained. This is illustrated by "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."⁴⁹

⁴⁹Mt 5.4.

1.79 Once a person on the path of virtue has arrived at the joy of hope in his practice, weariness is left behind and the weight of his ascetic practice becomes alleviated. From here he leaves behind the ministry of fear and commences on the ministry of love: he casts away the terror and fear of the journey, and the heart begins to be stirred all the time with confidence: the heart is sustained and the mind exults; that person no longer sees this world at all. From that point on, a certain hope of what is to come is continually stirred in his soul; this hope fills him with joy all the time and hides this world from his eyes without his knowing the reason: his soul simply exults from one moment to the next, as if he were standing in the New World. These, and the like, are what a person continually sees in his soul. They occur, as we have said, at the time when the soul has begun to separate itself from association with sin, and the heart has commenced, by means of that continual stillness, to become purified from the various memories with their varied images, such that revive the limbs of the "Old Man" in the heart.

1.80 When this stirring of hope has begun to act in a person's mind, together with the resulting joy whenever for no reason it suddenly springs up within his heart, from this point on he does not recognize any fatigue, or the weight of despondency, or the dread of death. Truly, I know of a brother who reached this point: so inebriated was he in his desire to praise God and give thanks for that joy of his that his tongue broke down and no longer managed to bless God: like an infant, he was left babbling, speaking with God like a small child with his father. To such an extent does the joy inebriate a person! With this joy, they say that the heart is made luminous and it enters into the noetic revelations of the intellect, something that constitutes vision in prayer. This is a first taste as people enter the divine haven; this is the completion of repentance; this is the consolation promised in the gospel.⁵⁰

⁵⁰Mt 5.4.

However, from time to time (this joy) is taken away from them so that they may be made humble: doubts, confusion, and darkness assail them—and then again they rejoice in their delight.

My brother, this (comes) with continual stillness and the complete deprivation of human company, (with one's) whole being occupied by these and similar readings.

1.81 O God, hold me worthy of the taste of delight that is situated in true repentance, and by which the truly penitent are daily nourished—people who do not despise weeping and mourning, or call it child's work: for they eat of the "honeycomb" that is spoken of.⁵¹

1.82 Apart from spiritual vision, weeping was valued by the fathers. It is said concerning the blessed Arsenius that his eyelids completely fell away from continual weeping.⁵² What should I say about these people, where, in the case of the blessed and mighty Paul, the perfect vessel of the Spirit, his eyes did not cease weeping for the entire extent of three years, just as blessed Luke writes concerning him in the Book of Acts.⁵³

1.83 Until a person reaches the taste of faith on the journey of his mode of life, he will stand in a feeble and weak state, wretched in the face of all sorts of passions, feeling the weight of every virtuous labor.

1.84 O Lord, who have brought me out of the world as far as the senses are concerned, by the might of your holy right hand, hold me worthy to depart (from it) noetically with the stripping off of the stirrings of the corporeal world, so that I may follow you fully, nothing apart from you being seen by me, except (my) wandering about in the hiddenness of your glorious mysteries. O Lord, cleanse my heart from meditating on earthly things, and direct my gaze towards that hope that is to come.

⁵¹Cf. 1 Sam (1 Kg LXX) 14.27.

⁵²Cf. *Paradise of the Fathers* (AMS 7:498).

⁵³Acts 20.31.

1.85 The body's *process of dying*⁵⁴ consists in a person's becoming completely separated from his acquaintances, his home, his family, and his relations.⁵⁵ Departing to a foreign country, he selects a still location, one without any disturbances, and he dwells there alone in poverty and bodily need, withdrawn from all human company and converse, and from visible comforts, beseeching God in lamentation and tears, his heart suffering pain, *asking* that he purify him from association with sin, and strip from him the limbs of the "Old Man"⁵⁶ who sins, these limbs being worldly stirrings. This *process of dying* gives birth to the soul's *process of dying*.

1.86 O Only-Begotten from the womb of the Father, the beauty of whose being puts the spiritual worlds in a *state of wonder* at every moment, out of love for mortals you covered over your glorious radiance with the veil of the flesh,⁵⁷ and you were manifested to the world under a lowly appearance, in your grace hold me worthy, Lord, that I become forgetful of the world of time out of desire for you. May I not be mindful of the flesh, subject to corruption, in which I am held by the dominion of this dark world. Depict in my hidden mind, with the delineations of the Spirit, the mysteries of your hiddenness, and may I delight in you in my hidden self at the stirrings that see without the physical eyes.

1.87 The *process of the soul's dying* is *when* a person does not yearn in his heart for the good things of this world and its transient comforts, and finds no delight when his thoughts are distracted by coveting after things on earth. Instead, his mind is continually eager for that hope of future things, longing unrestingly in its expectation; his entire meditation and the occupation of his heart at every moment is on the things that are prepared for human beings after the resurrection, in the New Life: meditating, pondering, considering at all times, with the result that, because of the great eagerness

⁵⁴Lit. deadness.

⁵⁵Cf. Gen 12.1 (God to Abraham).

⁵⁶Cf. Eph 4.22, Col 3.9.

⁵⁷Cf. Heb 10.20.

of the stirrings of his soul at these thoughts, even in sleep his heart is eager, as his soul is occupied in the wandering imaginations and stirrings of sleep.

This is in reality the true dying of the person who has died with Christ. Such a person has died the death of Jesus—who is the Resurrection of all the worlds. Such dying cannot take place without the assistance and working of the grace of the Spirit. Dying like this gives birth to spiritual dying.

1.88 O Christ, who died for us out of love for us, deaden sin and strip away from me that “Old Man,”⁵⁸ so that with renewal of mind, I may stand before you at every moment, as if in the “New World.” O God, the heaven and the highest heavens do not contain you, yet you chose from us a rational Temple⁵⁹ for your dwelling place; hold me worthy to become a dwelling place for your love—a love at the perception of which saints have forgotten themselves and become crazed in following after you, all the time mingled with you in the inebriated state of their love for you. They did not turn back again once they had drunk from this fresh spring to meet their thirst for your love, for you had made them drunk with the wonder of your mysteries.

1.89 The process of the spirit’s dying consists in when the mind is raised up at the spectacle of ineffable and divine matters through divine agency, and all thoughts of things on earth are put to silence from it, as it finds itself in that type of what is to come, in the midst of wonder at the intimations of matters that do not belong to the world of mortal beings, and it receives in pledge that kingdom, by means of the senses of the spirit, in the ascent to those “abodes”⁶⁰ that do not belong to flesh and blood.⁶¹ This is precisely what is meant by, “May your kingdom come,”⁶² in anticipation,⁶³ a request

⁵⁸Cf. Eph 4.22, Col 3.9.

⁵⁹Cf. Jn 2.19.

⁶⁰Cf. Jn 14.2.

⁶¹Cf. Mt 16.17, 1 Cor 15.50.

⁶²Mt 6.10 (cf. K1.59 above).

⁶³Lit. “Before the time,” alluding to a *teshbohta* “Our Father who is in heaven,

we are bidden to make, and to meditate on at every moment, yearning for it unceasingly, «since» it is by our Savior that we have been carefully instructed.

1.90 O Hidden Mystery who were revealed in our «human» body that had grown old, reveal in me the mystery of the renewal of the saints who receive in pledge already here «on earth» the assurance of the good things that are to come.

In the stripping off of your flesh you laid bare the «spiritual» rulers and authorities,⁶⁴ and clothed our human nature in the garment of incorruptibility. O Lord, strip off from me the «Old» Man subject to corruption in the mystery of the Renewal, and cause the stirrings of the “New Man” to burgeon in my hidden limbs: with whom at baptism you clothed me in symbol, and who, in the world to come, is given in reality, for the delight of all who cherish your love, who have worn themselves out for your sake here «on earth».

1.91 The words about the union of believers with the Father and the Son that were uttered in the form of a prayer from the Son to the Father at the time of the passion constitute a symbolic foretelling that will be fulfilled in reality in the world to come,⁶⁵ when the affairs of this world have received their conclusion, and that «future» state has commenced, when our Lord has been raised up with the choirs of the heavenly hosts who escort his majesty, after he has judged the earth with a judgment intermingled with mercy, and with him all those who are worthy will have been raised up from this intermediary place to that eternal place, that place where the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are without limit, and the Mediator Jesus, the man from among us, through whom we see, in an invisible manner, the Trinity,

holy in his nature,” common to the East Syriac and Maronite traditions (Lelya, Second Sunday of Lent, in the former, *Lilyo*, Thursdays, in the latter). Cf. Sebastian P. Brock, “Some Early Witnesses to the East Syriac Liturgical Tradition,” *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies* 18 (2004): 9–45, here 20, 24.

⁶⁴Cf. Col 2.15.

⁶⁵Cf. Jn 17.11, 21–23.

as if in a mirror,⁶⁶ and through him everyone will receive that delight that issues from the Fount of Life;⁶⁷ then through him all rational beings, from both earlier and later times, will be brought to God the Father and receive there the inseparable union⁶⁸ that is forever.

1.92 It is transmitted by the fathers that, at the moment when the saints are caught up⁶⁹ by the divine bidding to be raised to that blessed state as a result of encountering our Lord whose power attracts them to himself, like a magnet that draws in to itself flakes of iron,⁷⁰ then all the legions of the heavenly hosts, and the choirs of the descendants of Adam, will be gathered together as a single Church. And then the goal of the Creator's intention will be fulfilled, a goal towards which he had been looking since the beginning of the world's coming into being, from the time when he was creating the created world in grace. It is to this outcome that he has been looking during the entire drawn-out course of this world with its distinctive features, a world that, with its changes, was serving rational beings, as its lord. But in the courts⁷¹ of the kingdom they will henceforth find delight, in the world that has no end or alteration in the enjoyment of its life.

1.93 A material sacrifice is one involving the body, with which the soul shares with a virtuous willingness.

1.94 An immaterial sacrifice is a sacrifice involving the soul, in which the body shares through modest submission.

1.95 A sacrifice with⁷² no imprints is the adoration of the mind, which, without anything material, glimpses at the Spirit by means of

⁶⁶Cf. 1 Cor 13.12.

⁶⁷Cf. Ps 35.9.

⁶⁸The scribe first wrote *hdwt* "joy" (followed by Bettiole, Louf, Kavvadas, and Nin), but then corrected it by adding *y*, thus intending *hdywt*, "union" (cf. 1.87, and the opening words of the present Heading).

⁶⁹1 Thess 4.17.

⁷⁰Based on Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 2.34.

⁷¹See Textual Notes.

⁷²I.e., leaving.

immaterial utterance, and in all its stirrings inclines its head before that majesty.

1.96 Knowledge in prayer that does not involve matter is more excellent than prayer without imprints.

1.97 Immaterial knowledge in prayer is spiritual perception in prayer. Material words without leaving imprints in supplication constitute pure prayer.

1.98 There are material words without any imprint⁷³ on matter in prayer, and there are immaterial words also without imprints in prayer. With the latter, the activity of the Holy Spirit participates; with the former, the virtue of a firm will and the hidden assistance of grace in an unknown way, unperceived by knowledge.

1.99 Even in an excellent meditation there are specific stirrings, not only in the passions, but also ones that are luminous and excellent—but not, however, in prayer.

1.100 All specific imprints are a defect for the intellect at the time of prayer. When these occur from feebleness or ignorance, these are without any blame; but if a solitary is pressured by them away from the equilibrium of the intellect without a fight, then the solitary places himself under condemnation before God—whether his state is subject to passion, or without passion, except for when the mind is involved in some virtuous reflection.

End of the First Discourse on Knowledge.

⁷³Or: impression.

Second Discourse of Headings on Knowledge

2.1 Just as the changing movements of the air indicate that they have an Overseer, so the mind—with its conflicting changes, good and bad, to whose stirrings both battles and the assistance of grace are ceaselessly attached—indicates that it is being guided day by day to learning new things from them.

2.2 There are words clothed in matter that leave no imprint on matter, and there are those that are not clothed in matter, but nevertheless leave an imprint on it. And there are *times* when, being simple, they do not leave an imprint. When straightforward words without an imprint are stirred in prayer, it will bring to a conclusion the words clothed *in matter* and will also circulate back to him who is prior to everything and brings *everything* to a conclusion.

2.3 The usage of the *future* second state *provided by God*, who brings all to a final even state, has set this *present* state in motion with *its* many distinctions, which has come first, in accordance with the *final* completion previously devised in the intention of the Sower; *this completion* stirred him to come carefully to the casting of the seed, as he directs all his concern in the direction of the usage of the outcome, he being the one who had initially set the matter in motion.

2.4 The first utterance *was that* of the contemplation of the Being of the Godhead. The next utterance *was that* of the mystery of the distinctions of the Persons of the Sower *i.e.*, the Godhead.

2.5 When we fulfil the material part of virtue, we see only its distinctive «elements» in part. But when it is «a matter of» the immaterial, «we attain to» the contemplation of «all» its distinct parts. But better than both of these is the ministry that has no names, «involving» the departure from virtue to being raised above its distinct forms.

2.6 The first herald of the first light is the light subject to the senses: this same «light» guided the luminaries to the Light.

2.7 Observe how «the Light», which by means of its even lucidity, with its beauty first of all stirred the initial spheres into the first-born praise of the primordial light.¹ The very Same—with the distinctions brought about by the division into its various parts—had obscured, by means of his luminaries, the secondary brethren² from the «primordial» light, drawing the praise of the first contemplation to himself—to the same «God who» at the conclusion of the course, the «praise» will return, he being the one for the knowledge of whom everything came into being.³

2.8 The ancient orators⁴ received instruction «from» a single «source of» contemplation by means of bodies. Those coming second had as teacher the uniquely singular condition⁵ in the likeness of the body in which they were clothed.

Praise to the vastness of your immeasurable love, praise to the wondrous nature of your incomparable grace, praise to the unattainability of you coming down to our level: you set the spiritual beings in «a state» of wonder that they could not explain. Finally, with the reality of their body, you raised them up to the contemplation of his eternal thought concerning their establishment.

¹Job 38.7.

²I.e., humans.

³Translation uncertain, and the meaning of this paragraph remains obscure; Bettolo suspects the text may be corrupt, while Kavvadas provides a very different interpretation (involving the fall of Lucifer) from that adopted here.

⁴That is, writers of the Old Testament.

⁵I.e., Christ.

2.9 There will be a great expectation for you, O mortals, concerning your hope; acquire a lofty opinion concerning yourselves, for what is prepared for you—but is hidden from you. Your creation is not to be seen as having come about by chance, nor is the «divine» dispensation a small or comprehensible matter, for ever since the first day right up to now it has been administered involving vast changes with respect to you.

2.10 To the extent that the mind tastes some of the varieties of the first, unique, spiritual contemplation, so freedom of speech grows in it towards the Cause from which the contemplation is received, and towards which it ends up. Every mind is given a gift in accordance with the measure of the distinct ways by which it is illumined: in accordance with this is also freedom of speech, «but» especially corresponding to the quantity of light.

It is not «a question of» smallness or greatness with respect to the distinctions: the smallness or greatness of the light effects a greater or a more modest capacity in the mind that receives them. For this reason sometimes «the mind» approaches the limit of wonder at the distinctions, sometimes with the same «distinctions» in a more measured way. From this the abundance or moderation of light in the recipient mind is recognized, and the clarity or the dimness of vision.

2.11 The gift of light and the delight of joy do not follow on the heels of every «time of» darkness with its «sense of» heaviness at the struggle and gloom. However, for every gift these things will certainly precede, either «close» in time, or the previous day, or months, or «even» years, depending on the gift. There is no way that something good will come before the disturbance of great darkness and trial occurs to the mind. For this reason, whenever the mind is going to encounter the gift of rest, it is first invited to a great struggle and misfortunes, but on coming out from there light meets it, and corresponding to the weight of the affliction, so the gift becomes stronger and more exalted. We see that the same pattern is enacted with all the saints,

especially at the beginning of the entry, when they are entering on great temptation, as they are about to approach divine grace in a perceptible manner, one person enters a struggle with demons, another with hidden temptations: blessed is that person who does not end up in lassitude, giving himself over to «human» company and comforts, running away from stillness and taking refuge in ease at the time of these trials.

Elucidation: It is clear that the mind is not permitted.⁶ to focus on any thought «it likes». This is something belonging to those who are distracted and labor over affairs of the world; it is for the mind that «seeks» after knowledge of God to be focused on the mode of life of stillness, and every moment to be bound up in meditation on God, undisturbed by anxieties over many matters.

2.12 At the time when a person has begun to be separated from the sinfulness that resides in him, and to depart from being under the authority of the spirit of this world—as the fathers say⁶—there happens to him what happens to a woman when the time of her giving birth is close at hand: night and day the sinfulness afflicts him, so that the soul is more or less on the point of expiring, bringing upon that person myriads of temptations. But once the atmosphere has begun to be a little more pleasant for him, and he has seen hope facing him, from then on his heart takes strength against «Satan» who is opposing him, and in sum, he receives victory over sinfulness, and as each day comes, joy encounters him, and the various difficulties affecting him quickly pass away from him from that point, until little by little he reaches the haven of mercy. This is what the saints waited for after all their long drawn-out labors by which they were buffeted and afflicted for the sake of God.

2.13 In the case of that flame that falls upon the heart at the time of prayer when the limbs become paralyzed, the senses contract, the

⁶Source not identified.

tongue becomes feeble and ceases from *any* movement, together with the intellect, as a person kneels on the *same* spot for a great while. This is something we have perceived happening as a result of reading the *biblical text* with understanding: *such reading* indicates *divine* reality clearly and precisely. When a person approaches prayer, the recollection of his *words* inflames the intellect that is praying, at the insight from the sound words concerning God upon which he was meditating shortly before.

2.14 Until someone is held worthy of the revelation of divine mysteries—this being made known in complete purity to the intellect by means of the working of the Holy Spirit: in this manner spiritual delight is tasted by those who travel on the road to *spiritual* knowledge, whether by pondering on the Psalms or by occupation with reading *Scripture* or by prayer, or by the mind's meditation—until they are held worthy of the *divine* working in the intellect: with this partial wonder and exultation of heart they take delight in the joy that is in God, by means of the insights they received dimly from time to time, these being people who, for the sake of knowledge of God, enter into huge temptations every day, preparing themselves gladly for death, their spirit not saddened, nor do they abandon stillness.

2.15 The fear that is born in a person as a result of divine care at the time when his ship is sailing smoothly with breezes of joy and of insights that lift up the heart—out of dread of going astray *this fear* generates in the heart a divine sadness that in truth acts as the soul's fortress. From here pure prayers full of feeling are born: these convey both joy and sadness—that is, hope and fear, when that person thinks “Maybe I am travelling off the road,” or “Perhaps I am all of a sudden going astray from God on one *or other* of the byways of error.” From this point he acquires great humility in his mind, and out of fear his heart is not lifted up *in pride* at the good things that are happening for it.

2.16 The soul's refuge at the time of temptations and sadness is faith in our Lord. The refuge for its practice is acknowledgement of its weakness.

2.17 Those who are assured in the hope that is to come, and have been held worthy of that joy in the spirit, do not want any longer to remain in this present life; rather, their heart yearns in aspiration: if only they had already passed on to that *future* life and its blessed state. Those who have become crazed with this thought will recognize what I am saying: the world has been turned upside down for them as a result of the unbearable delight with which their whole heart has been stirred and filled.

Just as doubt has been utterly removed as a result of the assurance that their mind has received, *so* at that time their mind is longing for the time when they will have departed from the body, and those who have been held worthy by God's grace of this joy will see that inheritance with precision. This comes from him who pours out the gift of this faith freely on young children in Christ, not corresponding to labors, but out of his immeasurable goodness. He gives this gift to whomsoever he wills, for them to enjoy in abundance during this short life that is subject to corruption. What among things on earth is comparable to the faith of heart that is granted as a gift from time to time to certain of God's "friends"?

2.18 How feeble is the power of *pen* and *ink* and the traces of the letters to indicate in writing the precise nature of *this* action, in comparison with the understanding of those who have been held worthy, with these same actions, of the gift of delight in the spiritual goods that *come* from the abundant grace of God.

2.19 Praise to him who became for us the Mediator for these good things, through whom we have been held worthy to receive, know, and perceive in faith "what eye has not seen, ear has not heard,"⁷ nor have the senses of the soul been able to conceive concerning

⁷1 Cor 2.9; Is 64.4.

these good things that ‹God› has now brought out into the open in the “First-fruits” from us⁸—who is truly the Image of him who cannot be seen,⁹ who, being the divine nature, attached to himself that which he had taken from us for ‹the purpose of: the hope of rational beings; ‹these are things› that were ‹kept› reserved with him from the beginning, but now he has brought them out into the open. Through him ‹God› made them known to us by means of some of them, in order to give confirmation concerning the rest of the things reserved for us at the Renewal, which this established ‹world› is going to receive through him.

2.20 The stirring of anger in ‹human› nature is not a matter for reproach when it occurs in us as a result of a natural impulsion—like the suffering of hunger, and the impulse of desire as a result of ‹specific› reasons: ‹human› nature of its own accord comes up with them and we are not subject to blame for their being stirred up. Thus in the case of that ‹stirring› of anger there is no blame when it is aroused in a person for ‹particular› reasons that arouse it in us. But when we make use of it in ‹our› actions, or by giving it space to hang on in our mind, by dwelling on it in our thoughts, then it is not for the fact of our being provoked to anger that we are blameworthy, but if we put it into action, impulsively issuing unthinking words to hurt someone, or by initiating some action or other impulsively out of ‹anger›—even if it is good ‹in itself›, we are subject to blame. This is the case whenever we complete some ‹action› against someone out of the inclination of anger. Now the frequency of anger, the tendency towards it, and its lasting ‹character› are a sign of great sickness of soul. In those who are wary, ‹anger› customarily takes hold of them as a result of depression and affliction of mind, since they are abandoning themselves without healing, not having taken care to acquire magnanimity of heart in their afflictions, whereas in those who are at ease, ‹anger comes› from much desire for things of

⁸Cf. 1 Cor 15.20, 23.

⁹Col 1.15.

delight. The passion of anger can also stir in a person as a result of pride or vainglory.

2.21 As for the passion of fornication, if it is not stirred by some outside cause, «human» nature cannot speedily dismiss its customary arousal, with its warm and uncontrollable impulses: this happens to us with abandonment from above under the guise of a battle, even when there is no external source to set it off. Outside these two «following» causes, abandonment in this matter does not happen: either we find fault with, or despise, someone over this matter, or at a supposition concerning ourselves that has remained for a while in our thoughts, and we have confirmed «this» thought and been persuaded by our own strength that we have got the better «of the passion» by our own diligence—showing ingratitude to the divine assistance that brings all virtues to perfection in us by means of a gift «granted» from him.

There are some fathers who say that a demon out of envy sends this passion against us. This is not to be believed, for it is by «a person's» own volition, without being abandoned by the divine bidding, to be able to effect this or anything else that causes harm. Otherwise it would not have allowed us to rest for a single moment: there is a guide with us! As for «the sense of» abandonment, these causes stir it up. Now whether this is stirred in us from abandonment or whether it is from an external cause, «coming» through the senses of memories, or luxuriousness, there is nothing that puts it to silence so quickly as prayers «said» kneeling, continuous prostration before the cross in our state of affliction, with humbleness of heart and enforced hunger.

2.22 In the case of any passion that we loathe, the terror of which is fixed all the time in our soul as we shrink from it, should it happen that the combatant is defeated by it, or is struck by a blow from it—whatever kind «of passion» it be—provided it is an object of loathing for that person, this is not at all inscribed against him by God's righteousness as a sin at all, seeing that, on the healing of the wound,

contrition follows without delay, this being the medicine before whose strength the wound will not linger on. That person's loathing is made known from the fright and the suffering that falls upon his limbs at the memory of *the passion in question*.

2.23 Humility is the virtue of a sound way of thinking. As long as it remains in a person, abandonment does not occur for him in any of the temptations by which he is tested, whether in body or in mind, involving one of the sufferings and pains affecting the body or the soul.

2.24 In the case of every passion towards which we show love and are pleased with, even if we do not put it into effect, we are fully considered guilty of it by the divine sentence, *and are* subject to punishment: we shall receive chastisement for it, either here or in the world to come, as if we had carried it out to the full in practice—whether it be the lust of fornication, or envy, or *thinking* evil of someone, or whatever passion it might be: because we have consented in our heart to something that we are perfectly aware has as its enemy the divine will, yet readily we are pleased with it, cherishing it and the recollection of it.

2.25 When there is vainglory in a mentality that is on the level of the body, it hands *that person* over to the passion of fornication; but when this occurs in a mentality that is on the level of the soul, it increases in us the ulcer of pride. The former *effects this*, by bodily features being praised, the latter by *praise*, for excellence of *monastic* conduct or of knowledge.

2.26 The acquisition of the discovery of spiritual wisdom in the mind is an indication of a precise perception of deficiencies in the soul. In so far as *the soul* is illumined with knowledge of secondary matters, *this is* an indication that it will receive a precise grasp of primary matters. The remoteness of something that was anticipated in words is easily recognized by a lack of awareness of those *matters*.

2.27 When, in one of the divine labors or temptations endured, because of them, you see in your soul a strength and endurance that is out of the ordinary, by which you are pleasantly strengthened without feeling the affliction normal for human nature, but rather, a certain exultation attaches itself to the heart, enticing it on, as it sweetens and alleviates the weariness and difficulty of the matter, while making the mind zealous, at that point understand that divine working is close at hand for you, and divine activity is looking favorably upon you in that task of yours.

2.28 When you see one of the passions—even though you may hate it—or some thought or other insistently being stirred in you in an unusual way, you should be afraid, for there is some cause behind it. The strength of our Lord—for whom everything is easy—can, accompanied by the suffering of the prayer offered up earnestly, cause it to pass from us when we call upon him without any negligence, and accord to our heart wisdom in the knowledge of a hidden matter such as this, providing a good outcome at its conclusion.

Elucidation: By means of prayerful meditation, reflection, and fearfulness of thought the mind becomes illumined through the working of God that accompanies the fear of God, and that person escapes and is delivered from the error of heeding Satan, who is in the habit of subjugating a person through darkness of soul. But prayer, because it is reflection upon God, illumines the heart in a natural fashion.

2.29 There is a sense of pain that appears to be because of God, either as a result of sins, or for divine things that we have not acquired, or the deprivation of them causes us suffering, but in reality it is a trap hidden by Satan for the mind that is calmly occupied with the fear of God. As it is written, “They have hidden traps for me in the way of my footsteps; they have spread out the ties to their nets in my paths.”¹⁰ Satan wishes to deprive them of joy and delight in God

¹⁰Ps 139.5.

through a sadness *seemingly*, because of God, and to draw them on to despair through fear of sins. We should recognize that in the case of all fear concerning sins or sadness concerning virtue in which the hope and compassion of God are not intermingled, but *instead*, it stretches out without change in a single direction, dangling despair before us, *then* we are manifestly being inflamed by Satan.

2.30 O Christ, who give life to all, it was for the setting aright of the human race that, hidden in your divinity from the eyes of the seraphim, you appeared in a human body to the world; give me wisdom on the road to you, grant me the wisdom to know how to draw near to your lordship. Cause hope in you to shine out in my heart so that I may become inebriated with it at every moment, and forget the mortal world at the pleasure of hope in you. O my God, hold me worthy of that forgetfulness that peers out at every moment over the saints as a result of the stirring of the hope in you.

Truly, my brethren, if I tell you that at a time when a person's heart is illuminated by this thought, he appears like someone crazed. Believe me in this: I am not lying.

2.31 Solitude lets us share in the divine Mind, and brings us close to limpidity of mind in a short time, without any hindrance.

2.32 At the time of the sinking of the light and the atmosphere is suffocating, diligently make use of outward means, I mean the bending of the knees, extended supplication, and so on. For all of a sudden the air will clear and the sun will rise once again, unhopd for: sometimes it sends *its* rays even to the midst of the firmament.

2.33 A desolate place, because of the great barrenness that reigns there, causes us to acquire a deadness of heart *to the world*, and it confirms the heart, mingling it with God because of continually gazing towards him, necessarily, night and day.

2.34 Humility is the end point of the recollectedness of the intellect. As long as the intellect is scattered, it is cut off from the limbs

of humility. But if you should say, "It sometimes gathers its thought into itself, but it meditates on «something» evil," show me one of the evil passions that is established in the intellect without the material images of objects. If the intellect is involved in material images, there is no recollectedness there. But if «the objects» focused on are scattered, is it in truth clear that the intellect is freed from images of the passions?¹¹

2.35 The state «required» in the soul for truth is the stillness of the intellect, for truth is recognized without any image. Truth consists in clarity of reflection on God, which is established in the intellect.

2.36 Every reflection that exists is set in motion by the object of the reflection: it makes an imprint in the intellect. But truth, because it is imageless, does not imprint on the intellect in its reflection with any material or composite thought. It has been well said by a certain God-clothed sage, "The intellect that gazes on God is freed from material imprints."¹² Thus every image that is established in the intellect is less than truth. Reflection on God sets the intellect above images.

2.37 A mindset that has died to the world is no longer ruled over by passion. Deadness from the world is a continual expectation of death. In the case of attachment to something or other, the recalling of it stirs strongly and warmly in the mind. But when the attachment has abated, the memory of it exists for a while in a person; when it returns again later, it does so in a cold and straightforward way, and the memory does not upset us at all. This is the deadness I spoke of. When none of the attachment to something is in us, the passion «associated» with it is dormant as far as we are concerned: we are not upset, either by the recalling of it, or by the sight of it. But when we do get upset either at the memory of it or on seeing it, we should recognize that it is still alive in us by means of our attraction to it.

¹¹The translation and sense of the last sentence are uncertain; see the Textual Notes.

¹²Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 1.46.

2.38 Compassion is the manifestation of the image of divine compassion. It is granted in mercy as a gift to those whose hearts are directed towards him: *«these are people»* who hate the world and reject it for the sake of his name. For human beings who are held *«captive»* by this world, either at its glory or at the demands it makes, or at its ease, or at its possessions, it is not possible for them to be held worthy of this wondrous gift since it *«only»* appears with limpidity of intention.

I have never seen anyone who was fettered in the passion of his mind by any one of the things mentioned, in whom complete compassion was to be found. Some people are also deprived *«of it»* out of ignorance. To the extent, then, that their mind is covered over with one or other of these things, this *«compassion»* is held back to the same degree. To the extent that they are released, by that same measure this incomparable virtue will appear in them. Insofar as they are purified from the world's fetters, so mercy will stir in them.

Lack of compassion and cruelty occur as a result of a great profusion of the passions. Because the heart has been hardened by the passions, they do not allow a person to be stirred by pity, and *«such a»* person does not know how to feel pity for someone else: he feels no pain over someone afflicted, nor will he suffer when he sees his companion shattered, or feel any sadness over those who fall into sins. Rather, because of those passions that have been mentioned, anger and envy become strong and powerful in him. Sometimes a *«person»* is stirred to a stupid kind of zeal, wishing as if to take vengeance on behalf of God, giving no place in his soul to pity. You can find in everyone, so they say, these distinctions in this chapter.

For someone to give something to the poor is *«only»* a small and insignificant part of compassion, and it is considered as nothing by comparison with the prime elements, which are fulfilled in the heart, with the mind sharing in the taste of their suffering.

But what should we do here and now? We do not have *«the possibility»* of that insignificant part. When a person proffers a scrap of bread to someone, those who see it consider it as something great.

What is clear is that without the former features, God is not going to accept this.

2.39 See that you do not get caught by the passion of those who are sick with the desire to set others right, as it were, of their own ability; they want to become reprovers, wanting to set aright all the faults of their fellow human beings. This is a serious passion, and it is recognizable in those who have been abandoned by the Lord's care. This is especially the case if you are not the superior or head, but one of those in a subordinate role, and there are others like you. This is the role of superiors, and if you say that you are doing this out of love, you are not really seeking for this love. In truth it would be better for you to be found having fallen into some act of fornication, rather than into this illness.

You should not speak of anyone's fault to his face, or point to it in the presence of anyone else. But even if someone should say that you are very well acquainted with someone's weaknesses, say "I am not aware of the matter; for even if I have heard it hinted at, I am incapable, because of my own wounds, to retain any recollection of this in myself, or think about it." If God's love is in you, present yourself in prayer for the healing of his soul. That is, leave the correction to his Lord—who is wiser than you. If God is not able to correct him when you pray, maybe it is not within your strength either!

Should the person be your disciple, or someone subordinate to you, barely speak to him a single time; if he is not corrected, keep away from him. This is the perfect path of mature and careful solitaries. If it is a case of your friend, withdraw yourself from him. If he is blamed by many and upright people, and especially if he is aware of his fault and hears the abuse but pays no attention.¹³

Elucidation: This resembles what Mark the Solitary spoke of: It is better to pray in suffering for your neighbor than to rebuke

¹³See the Textual Notes.

him for every sin of his.¹⁴ And again, with the person who is disobedient on one occasion, do not put him under pressure by arguing; rather, you should acquire for yourself, by your endurance, the benefit he has despised. Your patience will benefit you more than any correction of him.¹⁵

2.40 Wherever you are, be a solitary in your way of thinking—alone and a stranger in heart, not involved «with the world».

2.41 Do not reckon the entire mode of life «as a solitary» and the wondrous labors «involved» in it alongside the fact of not being known or thought of, and the flight from everything. The flight from everything also grows and is reinforced by not being recognized.

2.42 If each of the encounters of the eyes and the hearing ends up in the growth of interior thoughts, what is the benefit in their labor for those who run eagerly after the former, but force the latter into silence?

2.43 This too is something over which many people are wrong, being unaware and not understanding: that we solitaries do not confine ourselves behind «closed» doors in order to cultivate virtue; rather, «we do it» so as to become dead to virtue. Virtue is cultivated by those alive; it is something that can be cultivated «while living» among many. If it were virtue that we were seeking from stillness, and our excellent brothers in the community cultivate the same thing, what is so special about flight «from the world» and the cell as a tomb? This is not the case: we are hoping expectantly to receive from stillness something that is not possible to find «living» among many, though it hangs on the eyelids!

If our course had been concerned with the cultivation of virtue, what hindrance is there for the «cultivation of» virtue that comes from dwelling among many? Being among many has never

¹⁴Mark the Monk, *On the Spiritual Law* 133 (PPS 37:104; SC 445:108). Mark has “in piety” «*met’ eulabeias*» rather than “in suffering.”

¹⁵Mark the Monk, *Justified by Works* 200 (PPS 37:137; SC 445:194).

prevented fasting, the office, and acts of charity—as well as other such things: it even gives more opportunity! And besides, we do not know a kind of virtue that lies outside these things.

2.44 The spiritual delight that is granted in the hidden ministry is not reckoned alongside virtue: it is the lord of virtue. Virtue consists in every undertaking carried out for the sake of God, in the open and with the body's senses. Accordingly, we cultivate virtue in the community, and after the departure from it we enter into stillness, waiting expectantly to be held worthy of this *delight*. What is known is that even the sound of a bird can disturb *the stillness*, let alone constant coming and going, and the sight of many people. We observe that many of our spiritual fathers do not have a *physical* body suited for undertaking the labors of virtue, and do not wish to leave the stillness, but *instead* lie prostrate inside *their cell*, the door locked in their faces, just keeping still. Should they then abandon the stillness because they do not have labors? The enjoyment of solitude does not allow them to give themselves over to the constant sight of the assembled *community*; more pleasing for them is the single prayer that they offer to God in stillness, prostrated in their heart, accompanied by a sweet suffering and humility; *all this*, rather than offering myriads of labors and prayers to God outside their cell, and rather than the sight and fine converse with the world, or all the ceremonies of the festivals.¹⁶ The end point of virtue is solitary converse and the intellect's serene meditation on God. The solitary does not have any festival on earth: the solitary's festival is his mourning, and instead of the labors about which others boast pleasurably amongst each other, for him it is his affliction in stillness.

So, our brother, in the case of *this* deprivation of converse, the mourning and suffering of mind, assiduous kneeling before God, do you not reckon these as labor? Or do you only consider the complete fast and much reciting *of the Psalter* to be labor? Do you not consider the labor of the heart and the perseverance involved in the

¹⁶“Of the festivals” is the reading of Sinai Syr. 14; B has “and the festivals.”

solitary life to be an excellent labor? Do you consider a person not to be blessed and close to God who, even though he eats and sleeps each day and has only the arduous role of the solitary life all his days; who, even if for a single time each day he groans for himself, thrown prostrate before God in suffering—why? Tell me.

Many people, and maybe the whole Christian community, gladly and valiantly bear the body's labor, joyfully cultivating all those virtues mentioned above, yet they do not dare to give themselves over to this.

Do not be grieved that you have no bodily labor, my brother who dwell in stillness, weak in body, for your portion is greater than that of those who toil accompanied by all sorts of labors and special virtues outside the life of stillness. Great is the gift that has been granted to you, for it consists in the endurance and love that exists in stillness, away from the things that a strong body grants to them.

I have made this Heading longer than what is usual in all the others because I see that no small loss occurs to many as a result of this idea. For when they adopt this life of stillness, because of their illumined state and humility, having acquired great fervor and contempt for the world, just because their body is not capable of labors, because they are unable to fast and keep vigil and labor with the body like many others, they despair. Many of those who lack wisdom and take pride in the body, even hinder these solitaries, by their empty words, from the task, which is so great and wonderful, of enclosure and stillness with one's soul—something that is granted to only a few individuals as a gift from God—to persevere with weakness of limbs in the arduousness of the solitary life, and the toil and pain of heart—something that the experts and warriors shrink away from in fright!

Truly, the labor of a hundred brethren who, amid disturbance and converse, fast and say the office, this does not weigh up to the ministry of a single solitary who dwells weakly in stillness, provided only that he is held back from conversation with people, and endures

inside the door «of his cell» without interruption, with no coming and going of anyone to «see» him. It is obvious that I am not talking about those who hold on nominally to stillness, for whom every day there is coming and going, with someone easily entering to be with them. No, it is about those who from Sunday to Sunday do not open their door, and who have no verbal communication or conversation with anyone, who sit with their door «closed» tight for the full period of specified weeks, or for an entire year, with the sole exception of «receiving» the life-giving Mysteries. Again, they do not meet anyone, and are not present for the celebration of feasts and gatherings.

And if there is a solitary who is capable of this grace, and has received this gift from God, should a superior or head of a monastery of brethren hold back this gift from the solitary because of «considerations of» ease and bodily toil, or out of envy, he will meet with God's judgement and will have to give answer before the tribunal of Christ.

Elucidation: True understanding concerning the divine nature is a spiritual delight when «a person» receives strength to receive an awareness of it, with firm conviction, by means of a revelation of the Spirit. Virtue without this understanding is in danger of pride and a confidence over a reward for his labors and his way of life, instead of «relying on» freely-given mercy.

2.45 The psychic body of the soul¹⁷ «is» correct knowledge of sound «human» nature, by which it will be protected in time of darkness and blasphemous thoughts, or of foul stirrings of the mind, and unintended occurrences, ungrateful thoughts, and so on.

To obtain a sound response «leading» to the hidden rescue and repose of the heart, and to strengthen the mind against them, or against in the stirring of sadness that affects the soul because of the great affliction and the trials of the solitary life, or of causes that suddenly occur from some other quarter, this is sometimes urgently required for us and we find great relief in it.

¹⁷For this phrase, cf. Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 4.82.

Not always, but for the most part, we calm «such occasions» by means of prayers. Now sometimes the mind does not persevere in prayer alone, because of its zeal, for it is the property of a sound and wise «human» nature to attain something that supports it at once, together with the working of grace, whether it be from some recollection from the Scriptures, or from wise stirrings of «human» nature for the strengthening of the intellect.

But let us not leave our soul entirely idle in these «stirrings», except for a time when this action assists us, both hiddenly and in the heart: no utterance is heard, or only barely, lest we be mocked by the demons when they gain strength against us in the face of this custom, and lest they cause us to cease from prayer and pleasing meditation involved in converse with God.

Elucidation: Cut off demonic thoughts through supplication—that is, when you turn your gaze away from them towards God—rather than sitting night and day struggling with them.

2.46 The words of the thief on the right side¹⁸ bear the aspect of faith and repentance. Those who believe and make supplication like him are without any doubt not far from sharing with him in the promise that he received—whether they be murderers or fornicators, when they put an end to their previous practices.

2.47 They are aware of the power of the divine concern that instructs, guards, and guides our infantile state, «I refer to» those who minutely observe all the time the mind's direction. How very often we train ourselves, sharpening «our mind» in preparation, and making promises, but at the time of action we are found to be wretches, empty of all our promises. Now when we let go of ourselves, become profoundly humiliated, and end up in despair as far as we are concerned, all of a sudden we find ourselves serviceable and valiant for any virtuous task, being illumined and fervent in all our stirrings, whereas the beginning of the course is not at all like this, for

¹⁸Lk 23.42–43.

we commence in «a state» of infirmity and debility, with corrupted stirrings and great heaviness of heart. And from these changes the concern that God has for the growth of those occupied with virtue becomes known: how it guides them in a temperate way—like the weather. At the same time, when they take on growth in spirit and delight, he will bring them nearer to a knowledge of his love, and to perceive it in the hidden guide who is with them; and they will recognize their own weakness, and the gifts and constant presents from God, and they will accept humiliation without being puffed up and falling into Satan's «own» judgement. Continual benefits, without any break in the conduct of mortal life, bring one closer to perdition than to bliss and «divine» assistance.

2.48 Through their involvement in sins people become the recipients of chastisement, but in the case of the error of the intellect, and with pride, they receive the punishment of the demons, because both of these¹⁹ are the cause of blasphemy. In the case of the first, correction comes with the sentence, but with the second i.e., demons, there is utter perdition.

2.49 Do not want to free yourself from servitude to the laws that are yoked to your mode of life until you have become aware, without any hesitation, that the document freeing you from your servitude has been inscribed on your mind, and the force of the stirrings of freedom constrain you: using a wondrous strength, it takes you out, against your wishes, from that high point. Beware of those who free themselves, although they are slaves in their emotions even if they do not acknowledge it. They are people who are displeased to remain in servitude to the Lord, subjection to whom in a humble way is a delight. Such people are giving tribute all the time to the enemy in the form of sickly and perverted stirrings.

2.50 Beware that you do not go astray after fantasies that the demons show, wanting to mock at you. Such a matter for the most

¹⁹I.e., error and pride.

part occurs to two kinds of people: either to the uneducated and boorish, who are puffed up in their minds—the demons become aware and present them with fantasies, sometimes when they are awake, and sometimes when they are asleep; sometimes, too, they cause them to hear deceiving utterances, and because of their lack of education they believe in the demons' error, falling into their hands. The other kind of persons are those who have acquired much labor in vigil and are constant in stillness: first of all «the demons» frighten them with fearful things, and when they see that they disdain both them and their apparitions, thanks to their faith in Christ and being aware that they do not have any authority over soul-less natures, while chariots and horses of fire surround them, protecting them—as we also see with the blessed Elisha:²⁰ in his case when the holy prophet prayed for the encouragement of «his» young «disciple», because «he saw» it was a trial of the Lord, he left him to be tested, so that by this means he might become resplendent—to the greater shame of the audacious «demons»; and so that there might be revealed to him all of a sudden the might of the Lord's assistance, how it accompanies him and preserves him, surrounding him amidst all these enemies.

When «the demons» are defeated as a result of this first «attempt», they turn round and manifest to that person some other sort of thing, appearing to him in a glorious vision, like a chariot of fire and a mighty apparition in the form of some king, clothed in flame and escorted by a crowd of demons, as if they were angels. For they deceived many earlier fathers in this manner: though these had not been defeated by terrors, they were overcome by shadows of the truth, and went astray, saying concerning themselves that they are “seeing Christ in a revelation of light,” and “angels are being manifested to us.” Sometimes the «demons» would arouse them even to «make» prayer to them!

As a wise elder said, “If you are an angel, «why» have you been sent to me as if I were somebody «of importance»? Perhaps it was to

²⁰2 Kg (4 Kg LXX) 6.17.

someone else that you were *really* sent? I am *just* a sinner: I do not wish to see my Christ here *on earth*.”²¹

Elucidation: “Boorish” is said not only of someone concerning learning, but also concerning understanding. A person may look at the Scriptures but remain distant from insight into truth as far as *this* understanding is concerned. Nothing is acquired swiftly with a correct understanding, if a person is deprived of the Scriptures.

2.51 Sanctity consists in a person’s being sanctified by prayer and by the power of the holy action of the Spirit.

2.52 Until our heart is sanctified by the Spirit of the Lord, we are unable to distinguish clearly the hidden stirrings that come from the working of demons or of angels, or from *human* nature, or from the stirring of the Spirit of Holiness.

2.53 Until our utterance is sanctified by the power of the Spirit it will not become fearsome to the demons, and natural beings, whether rational or dumb *will not be* subject to it.

2.54 Until we are purified from the action of sin, the action of the Holy Spirit will not reside in our soul, *enabling* us to become holy vessels for the Lord’s hovering presence.

2.55 When you are standing attentively in the Office of the Psalms, your soul in readiness and your body in complete modesty, *seeing that* in it myriads of treasures are hidden for those who serve *the office* with discernment, first of all, ask God in a hidden way in your heart that that fountain of Life may be opened up before you, such as is wont to flow at these times over souls that have renounced the transient world, *souls* which constantly behold the death of Jesus²² in their hidden limbs. They sing the Psalm in a serene manner,

²¹Cf. *Apophthegmata*, Greek Anonymous series, 310–12; *The Anonymous Sayings of the Fathers*, trans. John Wortley (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 207; Syriac in *Paradise of the Fathers*, III, *Questions*, 30, 38 (AMS 7:715, 717).

²²2 Cor 4.10

treating it as a prayer, without being concerned about the quantity of psalmody, but just as the key is granted to you, even if it is a single verse, so that you may enter the treasury of its spiritual meaning, which is opened by the grace of the Holy Spirit. The supplication that you want to be offered up needs suffering there and serenity, so that you may speak in his presence with the vast Intellect, in order that you may take from him what is useful for your impoverished condition.

Wakefulness of the intellect is essential in the praises of God, along with readiness of heart, so that when we receive the seal of the Spirit at the time of prayer *it is* as if the intellect is abandoning its bodily condition and is raised up at the recollection of God's majesty through extended converse with him. It is awakened to a knowledge of his glory as a result of these discernments that are located in the Spirit's verses.

Understand that I am not preventing length of prayer in what I have said, for it is possible with a single phrase for a person's prayer to be extended for three nights and days. Nor is there any hindrance or blame in the matter if it were on a single verse of prayer that *the solitary* should make use of all the days of his life in his prayer and in his ministry. Rather, it is because with the frequent changes of the Psalms there are many discernments by which the intellect is aroused to wonder at God. For this reason we make use of the frequent variations²³ but it is without disturbance.

2.56 But in the case of those who are beginners in the *monastic* mode of life, or young in attainment, one should not allow them to approach such things, nor are doors such as these opened for them, seeing that when they say fewer Psalms they are filled with bad thoughts, because they do not know the path to something else, or how to adjust their intellect to the meaning of the verses. Rather, let them labor at reciting *the Psalms* in full until they reach the *complete* measure, then let their body fall down in an afflicted manner, and the labor and the stillness will sow in them a spiritual seed. I

²³I.e., changes of subject.

testify the truth to you: those who are deprived of continual stillness, «even» if they hang upside down in all the labors of the solitary life, they will not be held worthy to approach these mysteries!

2.57 In the case of every gift that is granted that comes from God, its power is known in those who receive it by a manifest sign, for example, «when» virtuous conduct in the body is granted. «Whereas» every gift that is granted that concerns an understanding of spiritual matters and the mysteries of the Spirit, this is given corresponding to the purity of mind. For the former, there is no hindrance for the practice of a person's «ministry» in a harmonious mingling in «the company» of many people, apart from the free will alone of that person; for the latter, there are many hindrances and frequent obstacles that hold back a person from purity. For the guarding of «stillness» for a long time is overturned and reversed by something the eyes see just for a single moment; or some quotation, without sight being involved, stirs the heart of the solitary, and removes him from his peace of mind.

2.58 When you fall on your face before the cross in prayer at the beginning of the office, before you begin on the office itself, request this from God and ask him with pain from the heart that he should grant to you perseverance in it, so that, without feeling it irksome, you may be able to hold out in the recitation of the verses without having in you any battle with disturbance: «say» “Grant to me, O Lord, luminous stirrings that gaze on you during this entire office in the verses that issue from my mouth.”

2.59 Reject those who establish a perceptible image in their mind during the time of prayer: instead of one simple and solitary thought of insight at God's unattainability at the time of the supplication of our Savior, they are repaid by illusions of their mind. But as for us, let us leave them to be deluded by their hallucinations: while our soul is ready with total concentration at the fearsome time of prayer, let us give the senses of our soul to the Spirit of God in simplicity of heart,

it not being united to any of the forms that the mind brings up with *its* composite thoughts, as we await expectantly in faith that he will cause to shine out in our heart the reality of knowledge of him, as he himself knows *it*, by means of luminous thoughts concerning his majesty, which he casts in us: “whether in the body or without the body, I do not know,” says the blessed Paul,²⁴ so precise was the level of the revelation and exalted in its stirrings above remembered forms of visible things, and above all thought and thinking, or knowledge such that the mind knows how to recollect and to imitate in this world. This *experience* that happened to the blessed Paul was for the instruction of the entire creation, that what is seen in prayer in revelation to the mind—namely, things that are kept reserved in the New World, none of this has any semblance to these senses with which we are clothed, or to the sight, colors, and form of these elements *belonging to* this creation.

For this reason we await those future things in the time of prayer in accordance with the instruction of our Savior—namely, “May your kingdom come,”²⁵ the one for which we are waiting; not that we will boldly form *some image* in our mind according to our knowledge, it being unattainable in its modes by created beings, for it is written that “the like of it has not gone up to the heart of man, and tongue does not know how to speak of what God is going to give to those who love him,”²⁶ something that he, with the Spirit of revelations, imperceptibly causes to creep into our heart here *on earth* for those who await expectantly.

2.60 But these astonishing people say, “Is it not appropriate for us to examine these things with our intellect, rather than wandering with bad thoughts?” O clever people, lacking in discernment, as though the whole journey and these stirrings of the soul were *just* two: either gazing on a likeness and a composed image and depiction, or distraction with bad thoughts. Where is the suffering of mind that

²⁴2 Cor 12.2.

²⁵Mt 6.10.

²⁶1 Cor 2.9; Is 64.4.

a person receives from insight into the verses? Or that which falls upon him like a flame from head to foot, its force heating the entire body like an oven that is stoked, so that he is glued to the ground in the prostration it produces, which is unbearable from the pain that torments his heart, so that he grabs at the earth with his teeth from the intense suffering of prayer. In truth, I know of people who have stuck out their tongue as they lie on the ground, having taken their fill of soil, licking it up as a result of the strength of suffering that they have received from the verses, having fallen on their faces!

Where too is that joy that all of a sudden is dispatched into the heart like waves, submerging all emotions? It grabs hold of the heart with an ineffable exultation, so that it almost seems to a person that he is raised up from the body, and is not standing on the ground, all because of the heart's being seized by the waves of joy.

Where is that insight that all of a sudden peeps out, silencing the tongue in wonder, rendering a person so that he has no recollection or thought, being sunk in the wonder that has fallen upon him as a result of no ordinary sensation, which the intellect receives from the verses? Such a person becomes motionless in all his senses and his mind, these being deprived of all the things that bind up his soul with images and likenesses in prayer.

Where too are those who say it is not required to serve the Office of the Psalms? As before God, I am telling you the truth: I know someone²⁷ who was held worthy to receive in actual experience all these things in his person, as a result of serving the Psalms, thanks to the compassionate grace of Christ. And it was not just once or twice that he experienced each of these things.

It is with these matters, then, that from time to time God comforts us, inadequate and feeble though we are in our meditation and prayer: this is not because of our monastic conduct, but because of his mercies—quite apart from the vast experiences that do not belong to inadequate people like ourselves, but which occur with greatly advanced people who have attained to the grace of purity,

²⁷Cf. 2 Cor 12.2.

involving immense revelations and ineffable mysteries, along with a wondrous awareness of matters pertaining to the world to come, and a delight of an understanding that is beyond human nature.

2.61 There is a certain Power with a human being, and whenever it distances itself from him, immediately fear approaches the heart, and the soul becomes weak in all its noetic limbs; it becomes completely impoverished from all knowledge and that person is entirely stripped of the confidence of faith at that time: thus he becomes like a little child in his thought. But when this Power approaches again, immediately the soul puts on courage, and the heart becomes stronger than a mountain, and does not fear anything in creation: nothing moves his heart, not fear of demons, nor of wild animals, nor of evil and wicked men, nor sicknesses of the body, nor nakedness, nor deprivation of sustenance, nor, above all, of death, which is feared by human nature. And at judgment he is clothed with zeal like coals of fire, and nothing in God's creation stirs his mind—neither the sight of them nor the memory of them.

2.62 I imagine that this is the Power by which the blessed martyrs have prevailed in the suffering of martyrdom, and, heartened by it, they have trodden on the afflictions caused by their persecutors. By it too the solitary fathers have despised the enormous temptations of the demons.

2.63 Some of the martyrs perceptibly had sight of this, and it was openly seen by many of them at the time when tortures pressed hard: some would see it in the likeness of a covering spread over them, and some would see it like a human hand overshadowing them, and some like a handsome youth standing beside them. With this vision not only did they acquire fortitude, but they did not feel at all the torments to which they were subjected. In many cases the limbs of their bodies were cut off, and their lacerated body would be bathed in blood; severed at the joints, they were stripped of flesh and skin—their mind not suffering at all! Many times bodily suffering

was also taken away from them: as one of them said when they were severing and casting away the majority of his limbs, he was filled with joy at each one being cut off, and he raised up joyful praise to God, his mouth full of laughter and exultation.²⁸ When it came to their cutting off one of his lower limbs, his knees, he did suffer with this limb, and when they asked him why in the case of all the others he was quietly rejoicing when they were cut off, “with this one you gave a cry”—at which the persecutors also took strength, as though God’s martyr had weakened in the contest. He told them what was indeed true: “You should know that in all the *other* limbs you were cutting off, I was not suffering and my mind was entirely in heaven, but with this one I was allowed now to suffer, so that I might recognize that I am a human being, and that it was not the strength of *human* nature that was *active*, up to now.”²⁹

2.64 This is the Power that invisibly guards the solitary in the fearsome desert from harms from demons, it not being known to him from whence this is, how human nature living in the company of wild animals for a length of forty or fifty years, with fearsome struggles with demons, yet is not harmed by anything, and his mind is not put into despair; he resembles someone living in heaven, his heart exulting night and day, full of the joy of angels. This is the Power that solitaries see in their minds, being protected in the entire contest of their labor.

If someone sets a sign every time he becomes aware that *this Power* distances itself from him, and the moment when it comes close *again*, he will perceive from the change that occurs in him the ineffable Power that he suddenly sees in himself, and *he becomes aware of* the feebleness of human nature and the extent to which it is brought just a short while after it passes from him. With this *Power* the course of the solitaries’ mode of life grows. Often enough it alters

²⁸Cf. Ps 125.2.

²⁹The reference would seem to be based on the Martyrdom of Jacob “the mutilated,” also known as James the Persian (AMS 2:539–58, esp. 55, but Isaac’s text implies a further developed form of the narrative).

the condition of the body along with that of the mind. Someone who has become aware of this matter will understand.

With this insight, my brothers, we should diligently ponder, for we approach perfect knowledge and ineffable awareness by continuity of this gaze. Someone who trains himself in this knowledge acquires a great and limitless humility, along with a faith in God that is unmovable.

2.65 The First-Born of all creation:³⁰ of visible rational beings and invisible ones, in that he is the first to be born to the life of the next world, following the resurrection from the dead.

2.66 He is fittingly the First-Born for us, in that before him there was none who was born to what is yonder, and he is well called First-Born, not for us alone, but for the bodiless natures.³¹ For creation is also looking of the rebirth of them too.

2.67 If Jerusalem is the city of the great King,³² which is named after the *city* in heaven,³³ this being the name Scripture has given it, for it was there that the true image had been set up beforehand, then the designation of bearing an image, which was metaphorically set down concerning Adam,³⁴ was looking towards the fulfilment, which the completed action³⁵ has confirmed, of the appellation that had been anticipated with this quotation.

2.68 For it is right that all creation should offer worship to the image of the King. Never yet has it been seen by us right up to now that a single human being has been venerated by angels. He towards whom all creation, visible and invisible, looks and worships, and is called by the name "God"—rightly is the designation of bearing an image appropriate for him, through whom all will approach God, and in his revealed body we see his impenetrable hiddenness.

³⁰Col 1.15.

³¹I.e., angels.

³²Cf. Ps 47.2.

³³Cf. Heb 12.22.

³⁴Cf. Gen 1.27.

³⁵I.e., of Christ.

2.69 At the coming into being, among the holy angels there is none older than another in the nature of their creation, for it was after their coming into being that the Lord allotted to them ranks and honor as he wished. In knowledge and fervor of love there are the first, those in the middle, and the last. But in the ranks below, there is none who is prior in revelation, or earlier in knowledge to those in the ranks above them. Nor in the case of the one who is last does he have an understanding of those in the ranks that are ranked as secondary to their own ranking.

2.70 In all the ranks of the spiritual natures there is an ascent day by day, whereas there is no descent at all. Because there is no end at all to the One who causes to ascend,³⁶ starting from the one who is eldest and first of all in rank right up to the last, each day they are continuously raised up, ever since they were created right up to now.

2.71 What applies to us over the course of coming into being and growth in bodily degree, which is applicable to our constitution in this first state, «also» applies to those heavenly ranks for the mind, in accordance with their acquisition of knowledge and their growth, which is spiritual. Over the course of coming into being among us, «one» body receives from another; amongst them instead of this, mind receives growth from mind. Like students in all things, they grow in the mysteries that we learned of, by revelations.

2.72 When the intellect has received an awareness of the beauty of its nature, then it grows in the growth of the mystery of the angels and henceforth it is held worthy of participation with the angels in the revelations of the mind, because it has taken its stand in its former rank of the nature of its creation, which was constituted to receive the contemplation of the Prototype.

2.73 The first delight of the spiritual revelation of the mind is the contemplation of the care of God,³⁷ whose active power is perceived

³⁶I.e., God.

³⁷Compare the «different» five *theōriai* in Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 1.27.

by the intellect in perceptible actions. The second delight is his care in those who have come into being. The third delight is the contemplation of his creative activity. The fourth delight is the contemplation of his wisdom in them. The might of his unattainable thought is seen in the dissimilar variations of his judgements.

With the first perspective a person begins to disregard human ways and means: this is the first act of faith of the intellect.

With the second perspective that person relies on, and is strengthened by, confidence in the Maker.

With the third perspective he is struck with love of him, like a child who has become aware of his begetter.

On the fourth level, he is hidden in the cloud of his wisdom that is full of discernments.

At the fifth stirring he is immersed in stupefaction at the unattainability of God's intention, which escapes any explanation.

2.74 In these five different forms of discernment the mind is trained in spiritual perception from the time when it begins to become illumined with hidden matters, and by these steps it turns back and stands in the former state of its created nature. The continual ascent and descent in all these stages all the time corresponds to the eagerness and neglect, the darkness and light, that occur from these things.

2.75 These five forms of discernment reflecting the changing growth of the mind are comprised in a single summit of spiritual knowledge. They convey it to the second level of spiritual knowledge, which is the state of its first creation, the state that is related to the revelation of the spiritual natures;³⁸ it is named the natural state. Now this same thing is spoken of by a certain sage, wise in revelations, the head of those with spiritual knowledge: "The growth of knowledge of rational beings is in the vision of corruptible beings and of incorruptible; the training that it gives is in those who are

³⁸I.e., angels.

subject to corruption, its perfection is in those who are not subject to corruption.”³⁹

2.76 Now it is said by the fathers that when a person has been held worthy to see the radiance of their soul in prayer, then they are held worthy of the mystery of the angelic revelations in their mind and they are held worthy to receive in revelation unattainable things.⁴⁰ They call the radiance of the soul its “brightness,” for in that it is purified from all association with sin its brightness shines out like the sun over it in the time of prayer. The soul becomes light with it in the stirrings of prayer and in the office; and from the stirrings, the mind is drawn up by a spiritual operation into a certain insight towards divine and mysterious matters. This brightness they call the “first creation of the soul,” sometimes they call it “radiance,” and sometimes “its brightness.”⁴¹

2.77 The knowledge of those whose discovery of these mysteries comes only from learning gained by reading and hearsay the fathers⁴² call “ordinary knowledge,” whereas they say that spiritual knowledge is that of people who are stirred by the Spirit of revelation with wondrous stirrings that burst out in the intellect with an inexpressible exultation of the heart.

Let us examine our soul when we see these things being stirred in it: from where does the knowledge of them come to us? And if they are things learned, in what way does our intellect burst out with them? Does the intellect examine them in wonder? Is it as if with something ineffable that the heart takes flight and burns with an ungraspable joy, such that a person is not able to endure it? Let the person who is capable of understanding understand. This is not on the level of ordinary words, in which not even a taste of such things is intermingled.

³⁹Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 2.33 (standard version).

⁴⁰The source remains unidentified.

⁴¹Sources unidentified.

⁴²Cf. Evagrius, *Gnostikos* 4 and 45; *Kephalaia Gnostika* 4.6.

2.78 When, therefore, the mind has become refined as a result of the density of meditation and has begun encountering light, from this you will understand that it will easily receive wonder at the verses, whether of the recitation of the Psalms, or whether of their titles, and immediately the heart is stirred in exultation and it puts the tongue to silence. Any other demonstration for the darkness of the soul you should not look for apart from the deprivation of this joy that I have mentioned, which is set in motion in the heart by the hearing and recollection of the divine words. Who is able to endure in the presence of its sweetness? And what body can recline before it when it falls into this upsurge that causes the heart to take flight?

2.79 Do not be a lover of ease, lest you become a fount of darkness, not to mention a harbor of hateful things. And you should not believe, O my brother, that without labors anyone will be liberated from the passions, or that light will shine out for his enjoyment. For we see that all the spiritual gifts have been given by God to people who have subjected themselves to labors. Nobody has ever received gifts from God when at ease, and there is no one whose mind has become enlightened with knowledge, or anyone whose heart has received freedom of speech to make request of God, or anyone in whom fervor of this sort bursts forth. Through labors pious people, our former fathers, have stripped off from themselves that old man⁴³ and they have been held worthy of renewal of soul. It was not just restraint from foods that you should suppose labor to consist of when you hear of these things, or only standing on the feet. Fasting alone and the office do not bring a person to a state of luminosity; rather, I am speaking of perseverance, away from converse with human beings, accompanied by continual falling before the cross. When you participate in these things according to your strength the following are needed: great humility of heart and the rest of what is associated with the modes of the conduct of knowledge that are described in the books of illuminated and knowledgeable people

⁴³Cf. Eph 4.22; Col 3.9.

for growth in divine matters, about which you will also find in these “Headings of Knowledge” to a somewhat lesser extent.

2.80 See that you do not neglect any of your offices, but before you go to sleep, cause your body to labor over the office with many prayers, so that when you lie down the angels may preserve your body and soul in a pure state all the night, *guarding it* against fearsome visions, impure fantasies, and *other* causes of harm from demons, seeing that your going to bed has been sanctified, and your repose *has been accompanied* by spiritual praises and the labor of prayer.

Except at a time of sickness, there should never be an occasion when you go to sleep without your body's falling into bed as a result of great weariness due to the multiplicity of labors with which it toils in prayers, the praises, and insistent psalmody over many hours. There is no *time* when we approach our bed in a state of ease, otherwise the rebellious demons will be mocking us during the whole night.

2.81 An amazing question from a simple Brother, and the Elder's reply.

The Brother asks the Elder, “Father, I love continual kneelings.” The Elder says to him, “I think you are desirous of perfection, for I see that your intention is to depart from the body: continuous kneeling is the door that leads on to perfection. With this mode of conduct the saints depart from the body. Therefore, if you are intent on carrying out this practice, make a will. For the dismissal of life here *on earth*, and the abandonment and contempt for everything from now on, and *the words*, ‘See how we have abandoned everything and followed you’⁴⁴ are fulfilled in a person with this mode of conduct. For truly, it is not *possible*, in order to be confirmed in this action, to be concerned with anything again. But as far as possible, do not voluntarily abandon your Hours—for the hour will come when you will not even remember these things, for you will find yourself *as if* inebriated from time to time. But you should not seek

⁴⁴Mt 19.27.

this at once: it will be revealed at its due time; not that there is much intervening time until compulsion, against your will, will come upon you. Keep your rules well. It will then happen that, even if you wish it, you will not be permitted these things. But blessed is the person who has commenced and climbed to the top, having endured the temptations that come upon them with this practice, without losing heart and abandoning the journey. Blessing upon blessing if, once they have encountered some *obstacle* they have not been neglectful, stopped and turned back, having had enough, for their treasure grows all the more with the stretch of time. At the beginning you are capable of something small, and because you are not accustomed to spiritual matters *you* are in a hurry and think this is the final end, unaware that there is still the fragrance that wafts *ahead*: with it a person encounters many varied and wonderful things—but they still have not entered within.

“Now when you pray, say the following in your prayer:

‘O merciful God, send to me from your exalted sanctuary the gift of repentance, by which I may approach you, the Lord. O God, open up my heart to become aware of what is beneficial for me, that acute awareness before which a neglectful mentality cannot stand, that awareness that casts confusion on the *sense of* tranquility in the passions.’”⁴⁵

2.82 Weakness of the body does not prevent the eagerness of a firm conscience from carrying out something good, provided the will is not lazy. Nor is there any hindrance for actions in repayment of a volition that is perfected in divine stirrings.

2.83 “Daytime” for rational *human* nature is to be mindful of mystery, and to become more and more involved in the same. This constitutes “The righteous will become light like the sun in the Kingdom of the Father.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵Translation uncertain; see Textual Notes.

⁴⁶Mt 13.43.

2.84 When you sit down in between one office and another in order to raise up your intellect in meditation on God, add these considerations: consider how it was from complete non-existence that you came into existence; who it was who made you, so that you should come into being, into your present state of existence, out of your not existing at all; and, to speak in the language of Scripture, how, although you were initially created beautiful, of your own will you came to be in a bad way in that you ate of the forbidden tree,⁴⁷ and you continue to eat of it each day; and how you turned aside to evil because of what the crafty one had promised you—though the purpose of your creation by the Creator was not pointing to this outcome.

Again, consider what you have become, through your own will, and in what state you are now without any expectation, yet to what hope you have all of a sudden been called by the abundance of the compassion of him who called you in Christ Jesus our Lord, returning you once more to your original luminous relationship with God; and how you remained in your disobedience and persisted in your fallen state, yet God did not neglect you, but of his own accord devised these excellent things for you, coming to save you when you did not even know how to ask this for yourself.

Again, consider what you are now in this life here, and what you are going to be after a little; and in what state of corruption your present condition will end up, and out of your present existence you will again become as though you had never existed—without remembrance, or name, or memorial throughout all the generations to come of this world. How can I describe what is so astonishing: that out of such a condition of corruption there should be such a new state of existence, moving from such a hovel to such an abode; furthermore, the comparison of what is here with what is beyond, and the transition from our present mode of life to the future life, moving from suppositions to certain knowledge and vision.

⁴⁷Cf. Gen 3.11.

I have discussed a little on this large topic separately, in the discourse to a pupil,⁴⁸ by way of introduction to the kind of meditation that is suitable for the way of life of stillness. At these times, kneel in prayer continuously during the interval between your offices,⁴⁹ giving thanks to him who *⟨brought⟩* you from non-existence into existence, and is going to raise you from a condition subject to corruption to glory and a life that is both exalted and glorious.

2.85 Be orderly in this matter, so that by every means there may be an opportunity between the night and morning offices for meditation. This is useful all your days for your growth in divine knowledge. This indeed is the choice portion of the task of the vigil: do not suppose that the entire vigil consists only in reciting *⟨Psalms⟩*, or is comprised in a single session. Even though the foundation is from here, yet there are many fruits for the vigil of solitaries. It is by these that the soul ought to grow and approach spiritual knowledge.

2.86 The balance of sleep clearly depends on the stomach. According to our own will we guide and bring on our sleep: it is in our own hands, for when we have seen to the stomach in a measured way we will easily awaken before the *⟨set⟩* time of our own accord, because of the body's lightness, so that there is time for working for the two fruits.

2.87 Do the same thing during the *⟨different⟩* times of daylight, dividing them up into parts, some for reading, some for the office, and some for meditation. When this provides the opportunity for being raised up to the luminosity of the stirrings, let it *⟨serve⟩* as the fulfilling of *⟨all⟩* the rest. But if the mind grows dark here, add a reading that is appropriate to the time: from there, there is an abundant fountain from which pure waters will flow over *⟨the mind⟩* in a luminous way.

⁴⁸The reference is to Discourse 35 of the First Part. For "by way of introduction," see the Textual Notes.

⁴⁹Lit. session.

2.88 When meditation is united to prayer in its luminous state, then the words of the Lord will fully apply, when he said “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I among them”:⁵⁰ «that is,» the soul, body, and spirit; or the mind, meditation, and prayer. And the three of them will end up in wonder. But sometimes «a person» does not even attain to prayer.

2.89 Until the power of the Spirit is mingled in the mind’s meditation, wonder at God is not intermingled in its stirrings.

2.90 Until the mind becomes luminous, it is not associated with the activity of the Spirit.

2.91 Once the «mind’s» stirrings have begun to become luminous, then the heart is made humble and it becomes as though it is residing in some depth; and as a result of this humbleness it approaches luminosity.

2.92 Love the solitary state, even if you are too feeble for all the things that are appropriate for it. Better is one single prayer that a person offers to God by himself than a hundred offices that they serve amongst others. Truly so, because the labor of a hundred days «spent» with confusion and converse «with others», while the solitary is fasting and «serving» the office, does not balance with the sleep of a single night when he is sleeping alone. Pray this in your solitary state continually: “O God, hold me worthy of this suffering of «the life of» mourning in my heart. O God, erase worldly converse from my heart.” This prayer will raise you up into the mysteries of Christ, if you take care of its «proper» interpretation in your ministry.

2.93 Labor amongst human beings has pride in it; but in weakness, which is in stillness, there is shattering of heart.

2.94 Without stillness the heart is not made humble, and without humbleness of heart the heart is not set alight by various stirrings.

⁵⁰Mt 18.20.

And compared with these all the ministry of the solitary is dust and ashes.

2.95 Reject those who take pride in ornate diturgical vessels, and the office of the community, and the festal table.

2.96 When you see your ship travelling luminously on its course in the direction of the harbor, and all the time there are coming to it clear and pleasant breezes, while your merchandise is progressing splendidly at your hands, be all the more afraid and groan, lest all of a sudden your *«sense of»* freedom undergo a change and you be seen to yourself as encouraging an opposite course: all these vigils during a lengthy journey will end up in emptiness, when you are seduced on *«various»* pretexts into laxity of will.

2.97 There were many who began on labors in poverty and deadness with regard to transient things, with continual prayers and in tears with many prostrations on the ground and a life made humble, not being considered *«by others»*, with long *«periods of»* reclusion in stillness and withdrawal from people: all these things I have enumerated, yet they end up with ease, being recognized, converse with rich people, and continual listening to lay people. They have become reprovers and judges, advisers and involved in large undertakings, some to do with monastic communities and some with lay people; also the sight of women, along with counselling and instructing them. Their cells have become places of conversation and gatherings of the ignorant. Instead of that former deadness *«to the world»* they have chosen for themselves a disturbed life and conduct that lies prostrate in blindness. Their lives have ended up in a bodily manner of living, after all that previous exactitude of conduct and radiant life, when they were not pleased even to see the face of people, while resembling what is to come: they were in imitation of those who are bodiless in all the eagerness of their way of life in the life of stillness.

2.98 Every passion that is stirred in you *is* in the guise of a struggle, since fear and sadness accompany you in its battle with you. Even if you are sometimes overcome, nevertheless mercy is at hand to receive you, especially if you have not faltered, and you remain in the same defeated state, but being full of suffering, sadness, and sorrow, you have readily and courageously returned to the struggle against *the passions*, having armed yourself and gone down to battle with them. Thus, with all *kinds of* sufferings, you will find insight.

The soul that is in reclusion under sentence is the one that acts audaciously in the face of sins, having no shame of fear, being trained in a wicked cunning that does not know contrition, and no *sense of* suffering is to be found in it in the face of its transgressions; rather, all the time it devises means of fulfilling its sins.

2.99 Suffering for the sake of God is a medicine for the person who is struck down: "Sorrow because of God effects contrition of soul and returns it to life."⁵¹ Not only does *that person* have hope of recovery, but also mercy acts as an advocate with God in his chance wrongdoings, seeing that he suffers and feels sorrow at them.

2.100 God wishes to grant everyone recovery on every occasion. If a sick person is submissive and does not reject God's majesty as a result of serious and unpleasant sicknesses, the worse and more unpleasant the sicknesses, provided the sick person is submissive and turns back, *God* will show all the greater care for that person. For his door is not tight shut, and it is not a matter of one time and not another with him, for on every occasion that a person asks him, he is ready and prepared to assist; and he does not despise that person because of the serious state of the sickness—provided that the sick person readily requests him. Rather, he holds them worthy of all the greater care because of the gravity of their sicknesses that point in the direction of death.

⁵¹2 Cor 7.10.

2.101 What God's intention is, using the example of repentance concerning sick souls, is something of which those people are aware who, following their serious and dire falls, have received a gift in repentance, having been recognized by God as members of his household because of his gifts to them, and they have been held worthy of *their* former freedom of speech *with him*.

2.102 The contemplation of judgement, and of the concern of God,⁵² puts even the spiritual beings in a state of uncertainty, as it were in a dark cloud, in wonder at their inaccessibility.

2.103 To have understanding in a divine manner is a warm and luminous stirring such as *is the case with* those who, in the blessed state of natural life and the uncorrupted character of their labors, delineate the mystery of the mode of being after the resurrection.

2.104 In the case of those beings who possess their existence in a state of incorruption, apart from immortality, they remain metaphorically gods: in them is also the appellation of being spoken of as "they are."

2.105 Corruption on the one hand is in those that are mixed, whereas incorruption is in those that are non-united.⁵³ And for the former the second natural contemplation applies, whereas for the latter the contemplation of that which is prior in its distinctions to that which it has anticipated in its coming to being.⁵⁴

End of the Second Discourse.

⁵²Cf. Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 1.27 (these are the fourth and fifth of his five "principal contemplations").

⁵³That is, humans and angels ("non-united" = not being body and soul).

⁵⁴Based on Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 2.2-3.

Third Discourse on the Headings of Knowledge

3.1 There was *«a time»* when that there was no name for God, and there is going to be when he will not have one.¹

3.2 It is not because we sinned that we became mortal but because we became mortal that we were under the constraint of sin. The faculty of freewill, which was placed in between, he made it so that it should be for the use either for life or for death.

3.3 Some rational beings are without any appellations, and some have many names; those without name are the first. The distinction between appellations *«is»* in those who are constituted with a body.

3.4 Just as the non-rational light was entrusted for the distinction of bodies, so with the living Light we see the spiritual distinctions.

3.5 If the light-giving elements were made for things corporeal for the use of bodies and the discernment of the senses, there is a time when objects discerned by the senses will not exist. It is evident that what came into being for this *«purpose»* will become superfluous for use.

3.6 Just as all namings and appellations that concern God were with him at the beginning of creation, so too every name and appellation

¹Compare Evagrius, *Letter to Melania* 5, where Evagrius quotes 1 Cor 15.28. *Evagrius Ponticus*, ed. Wilhelm Frankenberg, *Abhandlungen der königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. Philologisch-historische Klasse: Neue Folge* 13.2 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1912), 616; translation: M. Parmentier, "Evagrius of Pontus' 'Letter to Melania' I," *Bijdragen, tijdschrift voor filosofie en theologie* 46 (1985): 2–38, at 12.

concerning the intelligible natures took their beginning from the dispensation that is in our world, and these are given names amongst us. In the worlds of the intelligible natures, there is no name, or appellation, or way of calling amongst them concerning each one of the individual *beings*, but they all exist in their world without name or appellation. And all of those numbers without limit of their worlds are natures that are unnumbered. They are recognized by each other outside these distinctions by an exalted knowledge without name or signs. In this mystery all human beings are going to be with them at the resurrection.

3.7 Virtue is the cause of both life and death—life for the diligent, death for the slack. You will find the application of the two sides in the open appearance of their distinct *characteristics*.

3.8 The common element of virtue *is seen* in the perceptible application by both good and bad people: the opposition between them *is seen* in the understanding *of virtue*. The same application is *to be found* also with the opposite *understanding*.

3.9 If everything that bears the aim of second natural contemplation² becomes useless in the world to come, along with all its forms, for “the form of this world in all its arrangements will pass away,”³ it is apparent that this contemplation too concerning it together with the vision will come to an end.

3.10 If there is nothing left of those things that set into motion contemplation concerning bodily things, the intellect will not need the senses or that upon which they settle, in view of the complete wiping out of these at the commencement of what will happen in the twinkling of an eye, *then* it is evident that also for the recollection of those things upon which the senses settle, there will be an utter wiping out from *human* nature and everyone will pulsate with what applies to the state they will have acquired then.

²Cf. Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 2.2.

³Cf. 1 Cor 7.31.

3.11 The appropriate prayer that accords with the single divine will, is that which is born in us from considering the divine laws, and from the care taken to fulfill them: the love of them forces us to issue fervent requests concerning them. Concern of the mind on the subject of the fulfilling of the commandments is pure prayer; also the suffering of the heart concerning negligence over what they involve is reckoned as being instead of pure prayer. Pain «endured» for the sake of God is prayer; or rather, it gives birth in the mind to powerful words and weighty stirrings of prayer. In the case of someone whose heart flares up and burns with these thoughts, sometimes his mind will actually be praying in a state of which he is not aware, when all his stirrings are wondrous prayers, pleasing to God, while the suffering of heart takes the place of the cross.

3.12 The wise words that are set into motion in prayer draw all the parts of the soul towards God with a sweetness, «and» to love of him, as a result of majestic wonder of the verses: they arouse the soul to look sharply and to consider God.

3.13 Prayer that is accomplished in a wise way—I am not speaking about the wisdom of this world, or of learned wording, which is full of stupidity and makes the soul feel ashamed in God's presence in prayer by «reason» of the vainglory that it holds out in the prayer, «all things» that shove aside any benefit from the soul:—no, by wise words in prayer I mean those that «originate» from God's wisdom, and spring up from the soul's illumination, «words» that produce warm stirrings in the heart as a result of a desire for true Life. «This desire» precedes prayer and warms the heart, producing involuntary words that the recollection of «true Life» forces it to sprout forth. Often enough, on the heels of these «words», tears burst forth as a result of the warmth of the heart and the assistance from God. And this is the “pure prayer” of which they speak.

3.14 It is not the case that in every pure prayer the mind is freed from impressions and from material thoughts; otherwise it would not

even be prayer and it would have become a revelation. On this level alone does the mind become imageless and without form, existing above impressions and materiality: as Evagrius said, "The intellect that gazes upon God is freed from impressions and material at the time of prayer";⁴ this constitutes a revelation that is exalted above speech.

For the rest, in the case of every prayer that involves the voice, however pure the mind may be in it, it is unable to be above impressions. That alien thoughts should be stirred or not stirred in the time of prayer is not up to us, but what is up to us in them is to ponder or not to ponder *on* them. Often enough *when* a person prays purely and fervently, without design or their willing it, the stirring of their prayer becomes sunk in the denseness of material matters. Frequently this involves tears without measure, and the stirring concerns future things during this fervor of prayer. *A person* struggles to lift his mind from that denseness, but afterwards without his being aware it alights on something else. However, this does not happen in a passible way, nor *should it be* the aim of meditation.

Unless the mind has been held worthy of revelation in prayer *involving* spiritual perception, it is not possible for the stirrings at the time of prayer to be above impressions. A stirring that is above materiality occurs only *at the level of* the spiritual mode of life in human nature, when it is found to be above the flesh in its sensation, seeing that it is a level above *human* nature. Insofar as a person has not been held worthy of these things, he does not know how to bring to remembrance in the mode of life that belongs here *on earth* anything that stirs prayer concerning it, unless, as I said, he has been held worthy of a spiritual revelation in his mind. Insofar as a person is travelling below this level of knowledge in his mode of life, it is not possible to be above the standard of this world in his thought. For even when he initiates his supplication's meditation on heavenly matters, he indeed knows how to make comparisons with earthly matters, except if he has not already been held worthy at the

⁴Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 1.46.

time of prayer of the spiritual mode of life, which is outside all use of imagery of this world in its perception—something that is far above the human way of thinking.

But if the person who is praying does not engage in a struggle with his stirrings, so that his mind does not remain with the imaginings that hover over his mind at the time of prayer, but neglectfully leaves them in his mind, he will gradually lose the entire purpose of prayer, as he begins on engaging in conversation with those imaginings. Rather, the task for the person who is going to pray is this: to be in a state of wakefulness in prayer, so as to purify the mind, and without ceasing to release himself from those who are tied up in earthly matters, until he reaches the spiritual mode of being, raised up in prayer above struggle, because of the mind's being raised up above every form on this earth.

3.15 Wariness over thoughts is the offspring of wariness over the senses. Concern over the latter is an indication of care over the former. Voluntary backsliding in one of them inevitably ensures being caught up in the lapse of the other.

3.16 The sacrificial victim of reconciliation is humility offered from a heart dead to the world accompanied by a petition offered to God on behalf of the recollection of wrongdoings in which a person is guilty before him who lives for all ages:⁵ either of those wrongdoings already committed, or the daily ones by which someone sins and slips up, then arouses his soul and snatches it away from him as he turns to repentance at every moment at the recollection of God's mercy. This prayer is more pleasing to God than all the sacrifices and offerings that exist.

Elucidation: That is, at the time of requests he is aroused to perception of the assistance with which he is provided by God; and it is not that he receives this assistance because of his requests, but at the time of making request he is aroused to a

⁵Cf. Dan 12.7.

state that always belongs to them, but he is unaware that it is from God.

3.17 A person cannot offer to God a single pleasing song of praise that comes from the heart without some gift that comes from him. Most people know this from hearsay, in contrast to those who have experienced it in actuality, because they receive experience of it through asking concerning it. The pleasure of God lies in souls that seek reconciliation at every moment for their provocations to anger, doing so by turning back to him.

3.18 Until someone makes himself humble, divine assistance will not come near him: God's grace stands at a distance continually, looking on a person, especially at the time of prayer, and when the thought of humility is stirred, straightaway grace approaches him bearing myriads of forms of assistance.

Elucidation: The understanding reader will take heed of his insight, and adapt to the common understanding, remembering the words "I have become all with all,"⁶ and so on. He should not seek insight here on earth that corresponds to the foreknowledge of God, but rather, in accordance with knowledge held in common; we too know that it is both true and not so. But let us take the part of freedom and consider everything belonging to this creation to be the same for the enlightened, and give praise for the mystery of the dispensation of him who has wished that the various manners by which his provisions come, should be veiled.

3.19 Great is the assistance that is granted at the time of prayer, more so than at the other times during which someone labors. For this reason, the fight that Satan has against a person is all the greater at this time, wanting to prevent a person from approaching God in his thoughts.

⁶1 Cor 9.22.

3.20 The entire wisdom of this world, the recollection of which occurs in prayer, is found in opposition to the soul at that time, and prepares harm for it. The wisdom of the Spirit, on the other hand, makes the soul humble and arouses it to consider God, as it were in wonder. And it brings the *«soul»* close to the profundity of humility through the Reality that it shows *«to the soul»* without any veiling over.

3.21 The invisible natures, the supernal creation, who are called “the first-born in heaven,” are made the more excellent by being constantly renewed: never at all do they descend to a state more diminished than that with which they began in an excellent way from the very first day of their creation, for they have never taken experience of evil, their whole *«existence»* being *«raised»* above, loving the things above. The only exception lies in those who, once they had descended, refused to look back towards the ascent *«back»*.⁷

3.22 If, wanting to be very clever, someone says, “So it appears you are implying that *«angels»* are undeviating,” that person is greatly deficient in understanding. Had he been undeviating, he would not have been subject to change, for he would have stayed in his place. And while he did not descend from what he is, he certainly is able to ascend. This is what a bound and undeviating nature is: it cannot effect any departure from this, either upwards or downwards; nor can it increase or decrease. Now that which is able to improve from what it is, and is also able to go backwards, should it wish, a being like this is subject to deviation, and it is *«well»* known that a being who has authority like this, when he directs his deviation in one direction only, *«he does so»* out of abundant love for the good, and illumination, and wariness that comes from it.

3.23 “Holiness befits your house.”⁸ This has the same sense as “What is holy is given to the holy” For we rational beings are the House

⁷Cf. Gen 6.2, taken as referring to the angels, rather than the Sethites (as is usual in Syriac tradition).

⁸Ps 92.5.

of the Lord, and when, as befits the Lord, we keep his House pure by keeping away from all evil, then his holy presence comes and resides in us—because what is holy is suitable for the Holy through a willing consent.

3.24 “Holiness befits your house.”⁹ Rightly is it fitting that the House of God should be filled with holiness and splendor. So too is it fitting that someone who is eager to become a dwelling place for the Spirit of Holiness¹⁰ should cleanse his soul of all that is evil, having become, as far as is possible, like the heaven; for just as the heaven is pure from all evil and is the throne of God, the abode of the seraphim, and all spiritual benefits flourish in it, so it is proper that the soul, with its concern and wish to become the abode of the Godhead, should cleanse itself from all hateful stirrings, and fill itself with all kinds of songs of praise: then the Lord will reside in it and fill it with the “splendor of his holiness,”¹¹ while surrounding it on all sides are the spiritual natures, whom it befits to hold in honor the abode of their Lord. First of all, a person cleanses himself from evils and fills his soul with a fine fragrance, and then the Lord will sanctify him with the Spirit.

3.25 It is a matter of wonder that those who have made the promise to live an ascetic life can easily, after entertaining thoughts about a woman, accept her presence in person, all the while being aware that Satan fights with the saints by means of a woman. They claim that they remain without any memory of her after the encounter with her—not to mention her looks or conversation.

If a thought should surface all of a sudden concerning such matters, sometimes it puts us in danger of struggle, more especially so when these matters are set before our senses and through the actual sight of them they set alight the thought, which should be abstaining from them.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Or “the Holy Spirit”; the Jewish origin of the term denoted “the Spirit of the Sanctuary,” which seems to be reflected here.

¹¹Cf. Ps 109.3.

3.26 A solitary who readily accepts the sight of a woman will also readily accept the pleasurable recollection of her within himself. In the case of a person who is disgusted by something earlier, it is well known that, like a coal of fire, he will also force the memory from his mind. Yielding towards one thing is an indication of a pleasurable holding on to what follows—whether *the progression* is from memory to sight, or sight to thought.

3.27 Keep your mind radiant, *well* away from thoughts of the body, so that you may taste that delight whose *description* does not fall within the tongue's ability *to express*.

3.28 The hope of things to come causes the memory of earthly things to be forgotten by the mind. Raise up your thinking continually, and gaze towards those *heavenly* mansions to which you are going to ascend at the end.

3.29 Despair removes a person from clarity of thoughts and buries the heart in the ground. Holding on to hope clarifies the heart, constantly irrigating it, so that it will be departing in its desire from earthly things, and wandering around in its stirrings among the heavenly mansions. For the heart will readily be clarified through expectancy.

3.30 The taste of the Kingdom consists in the stirring of joy that is extended in the soul, beyond *its own* strength, to future things, while the body is relaxed in all its limbs in the presence of *this taste*, for its ability to endure has been overcome by that surge that even *reaches* the bones and joints, giving them a taste of sweetness with an exultation that is outside what *human* nature usually experiences.

3.31 You should not suppose that someone's heart is stirred towards those things that are expected in hope, before he has scorned things visible and subject to corruption, and is neglectful of the temporal life. For that joy and the faith that gives birth to it from the soul's

thoughts, are stronger: it is not grasped in the soul alongside the joy of the things of the body; and in the case of a person who rejoices and grieves over things visible, that *greater* joy does not spring up in him because his heart is still held by infantile enticements: he gives honor to the body's ease and with respect to fear concerning *the body*, he is unable to despise it with zeal.

3.32 By cutting off hope concerning the body's life and the abandonment of its affairs, a person will easily encounter the soul's possessions, which are superior to discoveries *made* by the senses of the body.

3.33 When the mind is confirmed in its hope, even if the body becomes weak, the soul is not overcome or diminished in its wealth. But *there will be* continual weeping then, while the mind is still weak, but the body is being brought low and ceases from its course.

3.34 See that the body's weakness does not hold you back from the life of solitude. Your delight will be many times doubled with the infirmity of the bodily frame *when engaged* with the life of stillness with God. Beware lest you give yourself over to two sicknesses that give birth to an immortal death—these being the body's leisure, and laxity of soul by means of the senses. Sickness with wariness is something that does not cause us any loss.

3.35 Righteousness is the practice of beautiful actions that are carried out by us towards *fellow* human beings, in accordance with the law of nature and of Scripture.

Virtue is the practice of beautiful actions that takes place by us with respect to God, without any intermediary between us and him, *carried out* with the eagerness of good will.

A person who conducts himself in the first *manner* is "righteous," while the person who *acts* in this second manner is someone "virtuous." The hope of wise solitaries who are on the right path, towards which they are hoping the course of their conduct will

attain, is more interior than either of these two. «Such a person» does not remain «content» with righteousness, nor again does he stop with virtue: these are staging posts that he passes on from in the course of his journey, travelling on from them and directing the course of the road towards the «divine» Cause.

3.36 Just as the second part is more excellent than the first in its level, so the third part is «more excellent» than the «other» two. And just as when someone has embarked on the second, there is no way of pausing from the first, so when the third part has peered out within our ministry, there is no means for it to give place and find calm before the arrival of the previous part; rather, one should give honor to everything in its own time and place, lest our freedom be in a state of confusion because of the flesh.

For when there is no place for carrying out those things in the second category, those «placed» first of all should not remain without action. This is something that is obligatory for us to take care of without any negligence.

3.37 The tears that occur at the time of prayer and the sweetness also of the «Psalm» verses, which falls into the heart and sweetens it when the tongue clings in love at the recitation of each verse insatiably, not being able to leave it and pass on to the next as a result of its delight, «likewise with» the partial joy that every now and then occurs in reading and in meditation—all these things, and those like them, serve as a taste of the assistance of God's grace, a taste that is tasted without being known by those who are diligent in their ministry for the strengthening and the forward progress of the soul in virtue, so that it may add to its diligence.

3.38 That the intellect should «find itself» standing during the office or in prayer continually, again and again, all of a sudden involuntarily in «a state of» stillness for a great period, causing the body to stand erect from its position, this is the great door¹² that has begun to

¹²Cf. 1 Cor 16.9.

be opened before a person and is the putting into effect of the gift of God: this is not *just* one of the small gifts and partial comforts that apply to everyone. It is after this that we should run, my brother, and seek for this and place it as the aim for our ministry. Also concerning these matters it is not right to make too many words, *so* this suffices on this subject.

3.39 The aim among rational beings is an understanding of those things that are perfected, which exists within the hidden sense-perception of each one in those who work for it.

3.40 If the light of rationality has the ability to guide towards the primordial light easily without any obstacle, and the same *ability*, even now is in the first rational beings for whom the saving Word has taken on the resemblance of the mystery, it is evident that those beings in the incorporeal world will, in the same *world*, receive the inheritance of light, and not in *the world* that is irrational and dense—as those who are dense in understanding pretend.

3.41 Just as impassibility is not the same as not having the passions stirred up in the soul, but the inaction in *the soul* at the pleasure of the desire for their allurements, so also pure prayer is not the same as not having illusions of objects set in motion in the intellect when one is praying, but *rather, when* the intellect is not paying attention to their inducement or remaining in converse with them. From this it is evident that a struggle is involved, and that without a struggle prayer will not be pure and undiverted, except for a short time—sometimes with angelic assistance. This is only a relief we have from battles, in that *human* nature in a hidden way takes strength against the stirrings *of the passions* through angelic intervention, as the fathers say:¹³ and it is not a case of being raised up above the *fantasy-like* stirrings of the lusts or of the *physical* body. Cessation from thoughts, stirrings, and the onslaught of imaginings, and being

¹³Source not identified.

raised above them, is not something that belongs to the practice of prayer, but to a state of wonder at some revelation.

3.42 Pure prayer is that the mind should not be distracted by the things that the demons put into motion in the thoughts, or that human nature itself puts into motion, or from some recollection, or from the stirring of the atmosphere.

3.43 Also in pure prayer there are many stages, according to the stage of mind of those who offer it up.

3.44 Insofar as the mind is raised up above desiring things in this world, so it also receives rest from the likenesses produced by the thoughts at the time of prayer. When it is completely raised up above desire for things here on earth, then the mind does not even remain with prayer, but by the purity of prayer it is raised up, in that the dawn of grace continually shines out in its prayer, and from prayer the mind is drawn up every now and then through holy efficacy.

3.45 Corresponding to the diminution of desire for temporal things is also the diminution of pondering about them; corresponding to less pondering there comes the lack of thoughts, and corresponding to the lack of thoughts is the purity of the soul. In accordance with this, the working of the Spirit is granted to the mind in prayer. For it is apparent that necessarily this is attached to the raising up above desire for visible and temporal things and also the bodily distancing from them, and the manifest sense of liberation.

3.46 As long as the mind is below the level of pure prayer at the time of supplication, in its prayer it is in a state of feebleness with respect to the stirrings of the soul, being in subjection to the wishes of the flesh. When the mind is in a state of purity of prayer, it stands in its practice on the complete level of the soul. When it is found to be raised up above purity of stirrings in prayer in the spiritual mode of life, where below it there are grades of prayer, it is as though it were in that mode of life that is to come. The practice of prayer and the usage

in it belongs to a person insofar as that *practice* is conducted within the authority and understanding of the level of the soul. In this world there is nothing that is higher or greater than prayer in all its modes of conduct of the soul. Now in the world to come this too is going to cease, and people will be stirred on a level that is higher than prayer, and that level is served with respect to the perfected saints every now and then even in this world at the time of prayer.

3.47 All contemplation of the holy angels among human beings in this world conveys the latter up to the level of their natural creation, which is called “the two *kinds of knowledge above purity*.”¹⁴ For the mysteries that are performed beyond that level do not belong to the angels’ ability and authority to instruct, in that that level of natural knowledge also belongs to the spiritual ranks: the strength of *human nature’s* stirring is up to this point.

Those too above that level, when they are held worthy of being stirred, are held worthy of this by grace, and not by *any* natural strength or knowledge that has been transmitted.

3.48 These are the angelic motions by which the soul is illumined in a hidden way: these *motions* attend in us because of the *angels*, continually being with us, and their fierce love towards us: by them *human* nature is led forward, as it were by a kind of guide. First of all, in a hidden way they stir up the beauties of virtue in us—as indeed everyone is aware through this feeling in us from time to time. Sometimes all of a sudden a kind of burning fervor and ardent yearning for the Good is set in motion in a person: often enough this occurs with actions outside any religious motivation; for no reason, something springs up inside a person with a sharp *sense of contrition*; by it a person is raised up from all normal thought, and is enflamed beyond measure with a loving recollection of all that is beautiful. They say that this is the activity of angels that takes place at the good will of the Lord who loves humankind.

¹⁴John of Apamea, *On the Soul* 3.63. *John the Solitary: On the Soul*, ed. and tr. M. Hansbury (Piscataway NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013), 130.

It is not only virtuous people who become aware of this stirring, but also tax-collectors and prostitutes, wicked people and murderers. By it, for the most part, *the angels* draw us from evils to virtue, bringing us away from bad actions towards purity. From this *happening*, even evil-doers have repented, and so pleased God, as it is written. Not only have they arrived at purity of practice, but also purity of conscience, having been purified not only of evil deeds but also from thoughts dwelling on them. Often enough with those whose “soil is good,”¹⁵ that warm fire that they had received at the outset does not cease from them until they have even arrived at the level of perfection and they receive complete purity.

In this way the angels cause us to advance from evil to virtue, and by means of virtue they bring us near to purity, and with purity they train us in the two kinds of knowledge beyond *purity*: one of these is the natural state, and the final point of all the education that *comes* from the *angels* up to this level, beyond which it is said to be “the vision of the Holy Trinity,”¹⁶ the summit of the revelations of the knowledge by which all movement of the kingdom of heaven *takes place* with angels and humans, through the entire endless extent of that existence.

3.49 All revelation of spiritual knowledge that is beyond the contemplation of corporeal and incorporeal beings *comes* from a perception of the revelation of the world to come. In these two *forms of* contemplation of *created* beings is the total sum of perfection here *on earth*. Knowledge of the world to come among rational beings is also drawn from these two levels, but knowledge about the *divine* Being, and every revelation that they receive from this mystery here *on earth*, whether they be angels or human beings, comes from a revelation of the New World. Now in the New World contemplation concerning created beings is not set in motion in rational beings, for their stirrings are raised up above sense and intellectual perceptions. Now, these are *kinds* of knowledge, and not knowledge itself.

¹⁵Cf. Mt 13.8.

¹⁶Cf. Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 5.57.

For there in the New World, the mind does not wander around with many forms of knowledge, but with a knowledge of the One who is mediated within infinite wonder. These other forms of knowledge are a form of gradation, beyond which there is no need of further steps, but it is a ceaseless movement that is in God: human nature does not depart from it to meditate on anything else.

3.50 Prayer to which beautiful actions are not attached is an eagle whose wings have been plucked.

3.51 There is a pure kind of mentality and there is a spiritual kind of mentality. A pure mentality is when the recollection of thoughts about worldly matters is passionless. A spiritual mentality is when the mind is stirred concerning the contemplation of the thoughts, as a result of the thoughts brought about by the recollection of worldly matters: it is not just that the thoughts should remain in a state of passionless purity, but that the mind should peer inside them, and even suck from them the spiritual savor with the perception of the Spirit's stirring. The former can be established by labor and wariness, but the latter by training and meditation on the spiritual purpose of the knowledge of the mind at work.

3.52 The body at work with virtue is one thing, and the mind at work with virtue is another. The body's virtuous practice cleanses the soul from being subject to passion; the mind's virtuous practice gives vision to the soul, and brings it out of the darkness of ignorance and closer to knowledge of Reality.

3.53 Not all who labor with virtue possess the knowledge that is capable of seeing Reality. But all who labor with this knowledge possess virtuous practice with virtuous discernment.

3.54 No one with such knowledge is without virtue in his way of life. As for virtuous people who do not possess this knowledge, you will find them to be numerous. For this reason, let us hasten

after *«this»* knowledge, for it perfects in our soul excellence of conduct, and let us train our mind in the direction of a vision of wisdom in matters concerning God. But if our soul is in the dark about *«such»* knowledge, then virtuous practice will not remain pure with us.

3.55 There are stirrings of revelations from the holy angels that take place in us, and *«others»* that *«come»* through the activity of the Holy Spirit.

3.56 Every revelation concerning God's dispensation in this world, the stirrings of contemplations concerning things that have come into being, and the thought and knowledge concerning virtue that extends to the level of the nature of our creation, *«all this»* we learn through those holy ranks, being illumined in a hidden way through a commandment that comes from God. Revelations that concern that holy nature, and an awareness of the contemplation of the world to come, all of these are still hidden from created beings, being concealed in the hidden purpose of the Creator until the time of their revelation, *«a time»* that is determined by God, when he will cause to shine out for the entire creation *«things that»* God is going to show to the worlds beyond.

The revelation concerning these mysteries and the like, is depicted in a hidden way by the Holy Spirit within our mind; they are not mysteries the full knowledge of which can be discovered by created beings, or from the Holy Scriptures; nor do the orthodox fathers know how to speak or to think about them, nor are they placed under the authority of the angels, comprised in some transmitted form; nor is it anything that it is possible to produce from the mind, or a concept about which it is authorized to think. Rather, the Spirit alone knows the mystery and the mind that receives *«it»*. Even though *«the bodiless beings»* enjoy the mystery all the time, human beings do so *«only»* occasionally. The same thing should be understood also with reference to those spiritual ranks: revelations are known and directed, in the case of the angels and archangels,

from one another and rank from rank; and from them they are also transmitted to human beings, or they learn one from another and «so» are illumined.

3.57 Every revelation about matters here «on earth», and the dispensations that God wishes to bring to completion for the salvation and assistance of «human beings» in common—in that these are brought to completion through the «angels» as intermediaries, because they are placed as ministers for the service of the will of God¹⁷—are for the governance of all here «on earth». These «dispensations» they receive one from another, rank from rank, in that, at the outcome of events, they are going to come out «into the open» for the service of creation. Also the mysteries of what causes them, and the insights in them, are illumined one from another.

The revelation of the mysteries of that unique knowledge, and the rest of the matters mentioned above, «the angels» cannot learn or teach; indeed, there are not learners or teachers there; rather, the delight of knowledge and a revelation like this «are things» that each individual rational being who is worthy of this mystery will receive it by himself within the depiction of his mind, without any intermediary—to the delight of his own person in a hidden manner.

Up to this mystery there are masters and disciples, greater and lesser, superior and intermediary, but in the perception involved in this grace there is an even knowledge, for which there is neither ascent nor descent. Nor is there someone who now knows, perceives, and enjoys less, but at other times is engaged and illumined to a greater extent. Rather, fullness, complete in itself, without any deficiency, is what a person receives—the complete entirety, without addition or subtraction. There is no greater or smaller in «this mystery», when he has arrived at this revelation, as is the case with other revelations; rather, he is raised up to a single fulfilment, without change or alteration. There are no rich or poor, no givers or receivers. Witness to all this is also the blessed Evagrius in the

¹⁷Cf. Ps 102.21.

Kephalaia, in the Centuries, where he says, “In the second natural contemplation, some have authority, and some are subject to authority, but in the *«state of singleness»* there are not authorities and none is under authority, but all will become gods.”¹⁸ And concerning the even character in the first and last *«contemplation»* of the revelation he says “In the contemplation of *«created»* beings there is ascent and descent, corresponding to eagerness or neglect. This is not the case in the contemplation of the Holy Trinity: that vision is even: there is no ascent or descent involved.”¹⁹

3.58 Some revelations to the pure *«in heart»* occur through angels, and some through illumination of the mind. By its nature, the soul, once it is purified, can peer at things afar off, just as at those close at hand—hidden and concealed matters *«are seen»* as if they were in the open. *«They possess»* eyes like those that the angels possess, for their vision passes through all bodies without any hindrance. They are illumined so as to see sharply all hidden matters and things far away. This is so because the soul is of the same nature as the *«angels»*, and when it has become on a level with them in conduct like theirs, it becomes illumined with hidden matters. Error does not cause it any toil, nor does ignorance. But there is no revelation where *«the soul»* anticipates *«the angels»* in knowledge, for the soul is in a second place with regard to the angels in the *«matter of»* revelations.

Therefore, in accordance with the purity of mind—which serves as the *«soul's»* eye—it too peers out and is stirred by hidden things, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in whose light the *«mind»* also sees the clarity of the angels and of the saints on earth, all of whom who have become the light that *«properly»* belongs to all spiritual beings.

Therefore, when the soul has reached this level it becomes capable of seeing hidden things, like *«the angels»*. Sometimes it learns certain things from them, at others it peers out by means of the

¹⁸Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 4.51.

¹⁹Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 5.63.

purity of its sight, according to the «different» measures and depending on individuals and the matter «in question».

Indications of the two kinds of revelations are known, «depending» on whether «the mind» receives them from outside, from the angels, or whether from within «itself», having become illumined by the power of its clarity. Revelations through the senses do not require purity, only those in the mind, and this is the indication of them.

3.59 All the revelations that are revealed by the holy angels to a person concerning the indication of matters or actions occur in these two manners: «coming» from the demonstrations from the spiritual writings, and from the instruction of holy people along with narratives about them. One manner is when it «occurs» in a dream, while submerged in sleep, while the other manner is openly through the senses by visible types of vision or a perceptible voice, as was the case with Jacob,²⁰ Joshua,²¹ Isaiah,²² and Daniel,²³ and the Twelve,²⁴ along with the rest of the prophets; likewise with Joseph,²⁵ the priest Zachariah,²⁶ and the remainder of other saints; with some of them it was through the perceptible vision openly, or with spoken utterances; with some it was in sleep: as though in a dream it was spoken with them, indicating to them concerning hidden matters. These are the various modes of every revelation that occurs from the angels concerning the prior indication of future things and instruction of something that is to be done.

3.60 In the case of revelation from the Holy Spirit and with the faculty of vision of the illumined mind «that belongs to» a pure soul, this occurs in a unique manner, distinct from these other separate

²⁰Gen 12–15.

²¹Josh 12.13–15.

²²Is 6.

²³Dan 2.19, 7.2, 9.21, 10.7.

²⁴E.g., Zech 1.8.

²⁵Mt 1.20.

²⁶Lk 1.11.

forms—that is, by perception that takes place only in the heart in a hidden revelation without involving the external senses, as was the case with Samuel, Elisha, and Peter,²⁷ and the rest of the holy visionaries, for they perceived things distant through the illumined eye of the soul; also reaching a person's thoughts, and the stirrings and actions of the angels and the demons, easily seeing sharply and without delay. Many of the other saints also revealed and made public the thoughts, intentions, and hidden wishes of people, also actions that were going to take place after years and generations, which were known to God alone. These are things many of which we find in the narratives about solitaries who received knowledge of hidden things and entered the depths and inner chambers of souls. With these eyes do the holy angels see what the pure souls of the saints also see with them. Not only this, but they are also held worthy of participation with God in the revelation of his mysteries.

3.61 The soul of a solitary is like a spring of water, as indeed the first fathers likened it;²⁸ for as long as it is still from the stirrings of hearing and sight, the solitary clearly sees God and his own person, and he draws from it clear and fresh water—that is to say, the sweet thoughts concerning the establishing of creation. But when he approaches them and finds them muddied from the disturbance that the soul receives, it resembles the case of someone who is travelling by night, at a time when the sky is covered over with clouds, and neither road nor path before him is visible, so he easily strays off into deserted regions full of harm. But when that person's soul is in stillness, like someone for whom a soft wind is blowing and the sky above his head becomes clear, once again it begins to become light

²⁷Samuel: perhaps 1 Sam (1 Kg LXX) 3.4, 10, 21, or 16.12; Elisha: perhaps 2 Kg (4 Kg LXX) 4.33–36 or 8.10, 13; Peter: Mt 16.17. Nevertheless, the OT references are puzzling, and these are only suggestions!

²⁸Compare *Apophthegmata*, Systematic Collection 21.7, where the soul is described as a fountain (*pēgē*); likewise *The Paradise of the Fathers* (AMS 7:773), and the Syriac translation of the Macarian homilies (Strothmann, p. 143, lines 135–36), where “thoughts bubble up in the soul like water in a spring,” but Isaac may well have had some other source in mind, since he uses a different term for “spring” here.

in front of him: he sees himself and understands where he was and whither he needs to travel; from afar off he sees that staging-post of Life. But because our wicked generation does not put its hand to discovering this fully, my brother—that is, ‘the possibility’ of finding a place for real stillness, as ‘was the case with’ earlier generations, wherever we arrive at, even if we find ‘just’ two days to sit with ourselves, we should do so—and even if it is ‘only’ one day. Not only in the monastery, but even if it is on the royal road, even just one moment. For that time has passed away, as you are aware, and we should not expect something well arranged in advance; rather, we should look, day by day, for ‘a moment of stillness,’ even if it is under some rocky crag that we are able to be still for a little, or among some ruins: wherever the possibility for stillness falls into our hands, let us seize a good hold of it, and let us be ‘just’ one or two days with our self. This is how the sages acquired themselves during this short time of their lives. Maybe, all of sudden death will overtake us wherever it may find us, and we will not attain to our expectation.

3.62 My brothers, the time of our lives is short, while our craft is long and difficult,²⁹ but the Good that is promised to us is ineffable.

3.63 It is not the case that until someone is fully purified he ‘only,’ then perceives the spiritual good and the indications of the New Life; rather, day by day, in so far as he overcomes the passions, he sees intimations of purity in his soul. With every passion that a person overcomes, straightaway ‘something,’ good shines out and is set before him. And in so far as he is purified from sin, so gradually spiritual rest encounters him, corresponding to the measure of his purity. And in so far as the mind is liberated from the fetters of thoughts about the passions, so a ray of knowledge shines out in his heart.

²⁹Cf. Hippocrates, *Aphorisms* 1.1; cf. John the Solitary, *On the Soul* (ed. Dederig, p. 76; trans. Hansbury, p. 158); see further Grigory Kessel, “Life is Short, the Art is Long: An Interpretation of the First Hippocratic Aphorism by an East Syriac Monk in the 7th Century Iraq (Isaac of Nineveh, *Kephalaia gnostika* 3,62),” *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum/Journal of Ancient Christianity* 19 (2015): 137–48.

3.64 Do not let the matter prove *too* heavy in your eyes, my brothers. When the thought comes to us—"Who has the ability to reach purity of heart, so as to enjoy the rest and bliss that belongs there?"—with *such a* thought the *whole* matter weighs us down, and we cease from the expectation, and from the fatigue involved in it. For it is not a matter that is modest or small, with a person all of a sudden entering and residing in *a state of* purity of heart, nor do they arrive unawares in a single moment at the bliss, perception, and mysteries of purity; rather, the land is spacious, full of borders, and those who travel in its direction are met by many benefits and wondrous delights on the way there. Even if battles from the Philistines encounter them on the journey, or certain signs and rest of spirit do not occur for someone, you know that it was not immediately after leaving Egypt that the Israelites all at once entered and took hold of the entire Promised Land; rather, little by little, and not until *reaching* there, after the hardships of the journey, did they see anything of the blessings of the land until they entered the city itself. It was only gradually that they routed the peoples and took possession of their lands, inheriting the blessings of the land.

All those peoples³⁰ residing in the Land of Promise³¹ have the passions named after them. Every people whom they routed, and whose land they took hold of, they inherited as part of the Promised Land.

The Promised Land is not small, and this *state of* clarity is named after it; it is not a confined space whose benefits and splendor we do not perceive until we enter and take the whole of it. Rather, the land is one whose borders are endlessly abundant in the quantity *of* their produce, a land whose borders constitute the realm of clarity, abounding in the variety of good things. Even if we lay hold of *only* a few of their cities, and *only* certain parts of their borders, we will have a commencement in no small way in the delight of their enjoyment—even if we *go on to* be attacked by other peoples.³² For this

³⁰I.e., the Gentiles.

³¹Cf. Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 4.36.

³²I.e., other passions.

reason let us take heart, my brothers, and focus our course on that land, even if we do not attain to the full extent of the beatitude that God has promised to our fathers. By all means we will not be without a portion in that beatitude. You are aware that Joshua, the son of Nun, and the men who spied out the land, did not enter within the city of Jerusalem when they brought back those glorious fruits to the people;³³ rather, it was from the lands round about it, and from its territory. Thus, in our case, if we do not enter the city itself, we are residing next to its boundaries, and in the vicinity of clarity. This is something most excellent that we should take hold of a portion of it and put a foot into its domain.

3.65 The produce of the passions is sweet, my brothers, but not like the fruits of righteousness. The produce of righteousness may be bitter and unpleasant, my beloved, but they are not like the final product of sin.

3.66 The passions and the virtues are not substances, but they shine out as a result of causes in our soul. A person who is well aware of this, what profit will he find from his knowledge, when, while loving the latter³⁴ in thought, in the open he is increasing causes for the former³⁵?

3.67 Sweet are the causes of sin, but bitter is their final outcome. Bitter are the causes that make virtue to grow, but very sweet are the fruits that shine out from them. Neither the sweetness of the former, nor the bitterness of the latter remain to any extent, but the outcomes of each remains with those who have taken hold of them.

3.68 Anyone who holds to the world of instruction as the true inheritance of rest, and considers its aspects that give joy to be a genuine possession, when that person departs from it empty handed, then he will realize how he has been mocked, by departing emptied of all these things.

³³Cf. Num 13.23, 26.

³⁴I.e., virtues.

³⁵I.e., passions.

3.69 He is to be venerated who in his unattainable wisdom has placed us first of all in a life of instruction, the world of flesh, and has provided a boundary to its going astray, the source³⁶ of vexations, he being the one who has prepared for us a glorious world whose life is not fettered by grief.

3.70 Through grace he has brought the world into being, and through mercy he guides its affairs. Although daily we cause grief to his compassion through the variety of our infatuation with evils, yet his love does not cease from devising immense benefits concerning us day by day, and increasing things that are going to help us, while *at the same time he is* well aware of the mode of life to which he is going to raise us: then there will become known to us the wealth of the exalted love of the Creator, when after these *present* modes of life, which cause fruits of excellence that pass away, or ones that await total perdition—or something I do not know how to describe: when after these things, again, in what splendor will he establish our creation from the dust and to what likeness and resplendent glory will he draw all of us up and bring us to become gods and sons of God! How appropriate and delightful to bring to recollection in this place the words spoken by the Blessed Interpreter somewhere:³⁷ “It is evident, therefore, that from abundant goodness and overflowing love God has come for the re-establishment of creation.” Hidden and concealed from created beings, is the reason why first of all he placed us in the world of flesh and in this present condition. For it was not so that he might examine us, whether we would be good or bad, and *as a result of that* sentence us to various forms of retribution here *on earth*, as is imagined by many people. How is it possible to think this, and then turn to the Author of the creation of the world, who from the beginning and before he began the establishment of creation was not only aware of things that he was going to do, but also of the things that were going to happen as a result of all created beings, whether human beings or the invisible natures? The precise

³⁶Lit. mother.

³⁷Theodore of Mopseuestia, probably from some lost work.

reason *for creation* is hidden, although he has given a little hint of it, so that we might have some knowledge and *be able* to speak about it. Thus it has pleased him that its precise truth should be hidden for the moment. Beyond, perhaps, there will not be any need for this sort of thought *on the subject*.

3.71 If God is Father in truth, he who generated all in grace, children being rational, this world being a type of place of instruction, he educates the state of childhood with respect to knowledge and puts it aright with respect to wrongdoing; whereas the world to come is the inheritance once full adulthood has been reached;³⁸ there is a time when those infants will become men *and women*, *then* by all means the Father will change the face of discipline into joy in the world of adults, when those children, too, have been raised up from needing to be put on the straight path. Your judgments are inscrutable!

3.72 Praise to you, the One hidden from all and concealed in your judgment, anterior in your knowledge to all you have established, whose love is outpoured more than the sea: You have hung a curtain of difficulty over the face of your kindness in order to restrain our propensity *to do wrong*. For if you had wanted to give us complete knowledge from the very beginning, you would not have placed us in this world, but *as it is* for the moment you have hidden those things that belong to your nature, while things that do not belong to it, you are manifesting for *the sake of* the weakness of your servants. These are things the precise nature of which you have not granted even to those heavenly and exalted essences until their time dawns, in accordance with the boundary decided in your intention, beyond *human* comprehension, for the revelation of their hidden character. In this expectation the invisible creation exists with groans concerning us,³⁹ so that when that hope comes out into the open, the knowledge of which it received at the incarnation of Christ, they

³⁸Cf. Eph 4.13.

³⁹Cf. Rom 8.26.

will escape from any compulsion to waver while we will escape from the chastisements of the mortal condition.

3.73 How astonishing is any meditation on how we are constituted! Even more astonishing than that is the mystery of your resurrection! Again, how greatly grievous, when it is examined, is the dissolution of your composition, but great and wondrous is the glory of your resurrection. "My soul is grieved unto death."⁴⁰ In faith, however, I take courage, because he who first died and rose has, by his resurrection, given the comfort of hope to the human race.

3.74 Do not be sad at your entry into the silence of the grave, O mortal most fair, who are subject to corruption in the ignominy of death: look how God has placed a limit for your silent and humiliated existence, and for your deprived state, not remembered by anyone. How beautiful is the way you are made, but how grievous is your dissolution! Let not sorrow batter you because of this, for you are going to put on this *same body, now* burning with fire and with spirit,⁴¹ bearing the precise image of its Maker. Do not let doubts disturb you concerning the greatness of this hope, for Paul comforts you concerning it: "He will transform the body of our lowly state and make it the likeness of the body of his glory."⁴²

3.75 Do not be grieved that for many years we will be subject to this corruption of death, beneath the soil, until the end of this world overtakes us. This matter of death and the entire length of our sleep in the grave does not weigh down on us, since it will seem to us like the sleep of one night. Look how the wise Creator has even made death easy for us, so that we should not be aware at all of its weariness. Only until we meet it is it difficult for us: we will have no further awareness of our state of corruption, or of the dissolution of our *bodily* frame, but *it will be*, like the sleep of a single night: when *the dead* arise on that day *it will be*, as if we had gone to sleep in

⁴⁰Mt 26.36.

⁴¹Cf. Mt 3.11.

⁴²Phil 3.21.

the evening and woken up *in the morning*, so easy for us will be the long sleep of the grave and the length of years in it.

3.76 There are five faculties of the soul in *our* united substance⁴³ *and*, the rational soul possesses them. That is, I am speaking of the natural desire of the soul and the irascible faculty, its assistant, since wrath is constituted naturally to be aroused after desire. Then *there is*, the movement of vitality that ceaselessly bursts forth in the *soul*, and there is simple rationality and composite rationality.

3.77 Of the five faculties of the soul, two remain completely inactive on separation from the body; these are the irascible faculty and composite rationality. One of these is not of use for the mode of the life to come, for there will be no voice to proclaim to it; nor is there anything opposed to the Good, such that zeal is useful for resisting. Two other faculties are kept in reservation, without bursting forth, for the time after the resurrection, *awaiting* the usage of speech in the world to come. In them is to be found the entire usage of that mode of life in heaven. One of these is simple rationality—namely, the intuitive mind in which *the soul* is stirred in contemplation concerning that Being that constitutes the sum of the kingdom of heaven, and the intellect of all rational beings, both earlier and later, is gathered up in the wonder of It; *the other* is the desire that belongs to the *soul's* nature, by which enjoyment of the Creator's vast love is stirred. It is by that *love* that the entire nature of human beings will be made perfect then, along with that of the angels and demons. While the angels already now exist fully in this *love*, human beings *do so*, every now and then, but the demons not at all, although they are going to be made perfect at the end, because of the graciousness of him who created them.

There remains only one of all these natural facets of the soul that continues with the soul at its separation from the body—that is, until it receives its mate through the powerful bidding of the Creator, consisting in the stirring of vitality. This single *facet* remains with

⁴³I.e., body and soul form a united *ousia*.

the soul, travelling on with it to the next world. The soul sinned with the body, and was likewise justified; and it is not right that it alone should receive suffering and joy.

3.78 It is by these three faculties that the angels are stirred here (and now), being (at the same time) those who are in possession of the state to come. (These three faculties) belonging to their nature are vitality, intuitiveness, and holy desire, which is the acuity of divine love. Speech and irascibility do not exist in their world: these do not belong to the angels' mode of life, for neither zeal nor speech are stirred in them. But they display these when they descend to our world; and just as they take on the likeness of our senses and become visible to us, despite this not being something belonging to their nature, thus in the same way, they are seen and imagined by us to be making use of anger and speech because of us. But in their world, there is no use of these. Just as God too (appears in Scripture) to use speech and anger, even though his nature is exalted above both, he displays these for our sake, even though his nature is raised high above speech and anger. Human beings will be (taken up) into this mystery at the resurrection "in the likeness of those powers of heaven whose creation resides in a great silence and wonder—or rather, in the likeness of God."⁴⁴

3.79 The spiritual natures (of angels) infinitely excel in knowledge, (starting) from what they have understood in our Lord Christ, having previously not had knowledge (that) he had come on behalf of their and our liberation and fulfilment.

3.80 Previously, when this creation of spiritual beings was in the process of falling away, it was not aware of the evil that was bursting forth from it: while they all existed there confidently, all of a sudden, they saw that one of their number, the leader of a choir, had fallen away from them, (taking) many with him, (falling) from that glory in which they had existed. There fell upon them all a shuddering and

⁴⁴Source unidentified.

fear; their created order was stirred in the terror that had entered and rested upon them. So henceforth, as if they had cut off all hope for themselves—since they imagined that from then on they would all fall, and fear of the Creator rested upon them, they recognized the magnitude of his might from this and it became known to them that henceforth they would all exist at his bidding. Now this fear caused them to acquire great wariness; from then onwards, when they saw the falling away and the Fall that resulted from this that had occurred to many among them, the entire creation of angels were groaning over themselves, not knowing there might be a time when they would be freed from this fear. But after the coming of Christ, their anxiety was dissolved, and now they endure the weight of this fear joyfully, having received the promise of liberation from it to come.

“They complain and groan now from its burden”:⁴⁵ this concerns the situation they are in now, but they are heartened by the hope of what is to come. For previously not knowing, they now know that they will be free from the griefs and terror of the present time, and are thereby comforted by the promise of this.

3.81 After the coming of Christ the spiritual natures of the angels acquired a more excellent knowledge concerning the wisdom of God, in that they saw the variety of ways in which God effected the dispensation with respect to us, gathering together each single element through the dispensation in Christ.

When we have received these things, we are all going to become one—we who are now striving in religious practice, provided we persevere in it—when we are going to dwell in heaven in great beatitude with the invisible hosts and with our Lord Christ; and there, we will all be seen as a single Church with our Lord.

3.82 All these things God is going to bring to fulfillment subsequently in an excellent way with respect to the entire creation: these things have been envisaged by God, not as something new,

⁴⁵Cf. 2 Cor 5.4.

but from the beginning of creation, and from before all generations these things were set down and prepared by God to effect, but they were hidden and concealed, and not spoken of. The symbol of them, however, was revealed finally through the prophets, and they came out ›into the open‹ at the dispensation of Christ our Lord. And they will all receive ›their‹ conclusion when our Lord shines forth over all from heaven and raises us from the dust, and grants to the entire creation, along with us, a renewal and the liberation from all causes of grief, as he raises everything with him to that heavenly abode.

3.83 The conclusion of the natural course of the world of elements is the beginning of the setting out of the World of Light. The conclusion of the mind's course in the ›different‹ natures of creation is the beginning of the stirrings concerning the Creator of those ›stirrings‹, the sum of the World of Glory.

3.84 It is asked, "Why do all the revelations from God take place for the saints at times of prayer?" Because there is no time suitable for something sacred like the time of prayer.

3.85 When prayer travels on the boundaries of purity, it is found to be ›functioning‹ with the stirrings that ›properly‹ belong to its nature; ›functioning‹ with spiritual fullness, however, is when it is swallowed up in non-knowledge.

3.86 If a solitary should be raised up to the throne of the Godhead in revelations, if he ›then‹ despises the Psalms, he will be handed over to the demons. The boundary of pride begins in a person from the point when he thinks highly of himself, saying to himself "Your level has now passed beyond those who use the Psalms." Thus Satan spoke to Ptolemaeus the Egyptian when he appeared to him in that foul apparition. Palladius tells of it in his *Book of Paradise*,⁴⁶

⁴⁶For Ptolemaeus, see Palladius, *Lausiac History* 27, where, however, there is no reference to the deception by Satan; Isaac's text is in fact a paraphrase of the deception carried out by Satan on Eucarpus, §73 in the Syriac translation of the *Lausiac History*: *Les Formes syriaques de la matière de l'Histoire lausiacque*, ed. René Draguet, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 398 (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO,

“Do not waste yourself away with the service of the Psalms; do not torture your body with the labors of the body: just labor with the labors of the soul. Gaze in your mind at me continuously, and I will show you my glory.” In this way he was mocked by the demons and abandoned by God. He ended up being thrown to the ground by them and thrashed, having been abandoned into their hands. They even put him in irons. He was drinking the washing water of the blessed brethren, and only just managed to return to his senses. He never again made use of his former practice of *periods of* stillness. And this was a man who previously had lived a life of great ascetic endeavors, living in a deserted place of stillness for no small number of years.

3.87 You know where the boundary of evil begins in rational natures, my brothers: in the case of that Morning Star who shone out in the early morning,⁴⁷ because it was insignificant in his eyes to be under a rule in accordance with the limit *applicable to* created beings, from that point he was abandoned by that power that he had possessed, and fell like lightning from his glory.⁴⁸

3.88 It was from the desire of freedom that the thought of evil took its beginning in created beings; a number without extent from the two ranks of spiritual natures—one of them being called the *Archai*, and the other the Authorities and Heads⁴⁹—one of them in a twinkling of an eye, fell from that glory of their blessed and luminous nature, and from the abode that is towards heaven and *their* habitation with supernal beings: these, like despicable reptiles on earth, creep around in the abyss. In the case of all those whose paths had gone astray and they were beginning to get caught in his net, at the beginning he demanded of them that they should love liberty and remove themselves from any rule or law, for then he would be able,

1978), 369–70 (= AMS 7:297). Isaac’s confusion may be due to the close proximity of the two names in *The Paradise of the Fathers* (Budge 1:266; AMS 7:165).

⁴⁷Is 14.12 (LXX). Cf. Evagrius, *Thoughts* 19 (trans. Sinkewicz, p. 166).

⁴⁸Lk 10.18.

⁴⁹Cf. Eph 1.21, 6.12; Col 2.15.

just as he liked, to sow in them his own characteristics. In that the divine power, hidden in being subject for our Lord's sake, does not allow «Satan» to touch someone as long as they are harnessed under «Christ's» yoke of their own volition; and whenever «Satan» wants to approach them in order to sow thoughts in them, that power blows on him and stops him from encountering them. As a result «Satan» looks for a means of persuading them by enticement that they should, of their own will, remove themselves from being under «the protection» of that holy agency.

3.89 Let us observe the bounds of being subject «to Christ», my brethren, lest we fall into the hands of the demon of pride, as a result of which we will be abandoned by the «providential» concern that holds us «safe» and surrounds us, «allowing Satan» to tempt us by means of immodesty.⁵⁰ «This is» so that we may recognize that we are created beings, and should not be desirous of that freedom that alone is fitting for the Maker. For a child, and for those who are feeble, there is no need for them to be caught up in pride, from which «Satan» would bring them into the temptations of fornication. But these «others», once they have ceased for a little from the labor of the «monastic» rules, they immediately start imagining shameful things, and they corrupt themselves. This is why the rule is appropriate for the perfect «as well as for» those in the middle and the novices: the labor «of psalmody» wins them a crown, and sows humility in them; «at the same time» it preserves what «spiritual» wealth they have acquired, so that it does not diminish.

3.90 There is an angelic thought, and there is an angelic contemplation. An angelic thought is when there falls into our «mind» a «thought» about virtue, or fervent contrition, or a wondrous stirring concerning the natural objects—such as contemplating gold, why it was gold. Evagrius spoke of this: “An angelic contemplation is when there falls into our soul a vision concerning their

⁵⁰For the topic of “abandonment” compare the “five causes of abandonment” in Evagrius, *Gnostikos* 28.

mysteries.”⁵¹ The former *‘is found’* with the majority of excellent brethren, whereas the latter is only *‘to be found’* with certain holy and advanced people.

3.91 The holy angels purify us with their revelations, and make us temples for the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit, through his revelations, makes us holy. Angelic revelations are not able to make a soul holy; they only bring us closer to purity from the passions.

Not all revelations from the angels purify the soul, only those that, on coming through the mind, arouse a person concerning insights, contemplations, and hidden mysteries. These are revelations of knowledge by means of which the soul is brought closer to hidden knowledge.

Revelations that *‘come’* through the senses and through resemblances of visions do not provide the soul with purification. Even if it is something remarkable that visions of angels should be seen by someone, nevertheless that person is not thereby brought closer to purity: *‘this happens’* only with those *‘revelations’* in the mind.

Once the *‘soul’* has been purified through the exercise of knowledge concerning hidden matters, the Spirit dwells in it, and it is sanctified by the sanctifications of *‘the Spirit’s’* revelations, made luminous through *‘these’* revelations. Then the soul is lit up like the sun, *‘able’* to reach the height and depth, width and breadth,⁵² of all incorporeal knowledge. It peers into hidden and distant matters, and the depths of thoughts. But until it receives the revelation from the Holy Spirit, it does not receive a profound vision of concealed matters, or *‘the ability’* to read people’s thoughts, and the stirrings and actions of angels, demons, and *‘other’* souls, or to know matters that have not yet happened.

3.92 All revelations that are about the establishing and coming into being of matters and events are revealed by those holy powers to us

⁵¹Cf. Evagrius, *Thoughts* 8 (trans. Sinkewicz, p. 158); for “contemplation of angels,” cf. *Kephalaia Gnostika* 5.6.

⁵²Eph. 3.18.

through visions, and they indicate and explain to us the types that are perceptible by the senses. Everything concerning their contemplation, however, they instill in us in a hidden way through stirrings of the mind that stir us with illumination. For it is «well» known that these things do not become revealed through likenesses, or the senses, or instruction, but in the thoughts that alight upon us in silence, in the soul that all of a sudden lights up—just as the holy Evagrius said, the mind lights up, “for when the holy angels approach us they fill us with spiritual vision”⁵³—that is, illumination, insights, and the contemplation of one thing or another.

In the case of the Holy Spirit, revered in his nature, there is only one mode, or manner, of his revelation—that is, only by stirrings of the soul, whether it be about events and «such» matters, or about their meaning, or whether it is about things subject to the senses, or those of the mind: all the modes of his revelations are formless, and a person perceives them in silence, without anything being seen by him; nor is any voice heard, but the soul lights up from within and it sees that it is receiving hidden matters—that is, a lofty revelation that belongs to the mode and measure of the spiritual world. When someone has reached this level, he is «both» a human and a spiritual being.

3.93 The kingdom and Gehenna are not a repayment for good or bad deeds, but a repayment for the will «behind them».

3.94 Chastisement is not an aim with God, nor is there vengeance on those who have transgressed; rather, «his aim» is the setting aright of those who are subject to judgment, and for the restraint of others. And where the use of these is not «effective», «use is made» of chastisements and punishments. Nor does God cause pain to anyone with anything like this in anticipation of events. For it is not in chastising that he takes pleasure, but in bringing benefit. Because of fear of deviation, chastisements are of use. Where fear of the former is not present, then neither are the latter.

⁵³Cf. Evagrius, *Praktikos* 76.

The blessed Interpreter testifies in the *Book on Priesthood*⁵⁴ when he says, “God uses punishments with regard to us because of our own need”—that is, they give birth to fear in each soul. “And what is the use of fear, Father?” “Fear,” he says, “is useful to make us wary.” A demonstration of this is that in the world to come fear is removed: only love has control. “And when he is going to remove sin, he will also remove punishment.” Now when punishments are removed, fear is also removed from there.

3.95 Virtue is not the offspring of good work, but of a good volition.

3.96 In the case of good and bad actions, where volition has no part in them, the recompense that seems appropriate for their outward perception does not correspond with those who carry them out.

3.97 So when volition, while looking towards something other, prepares the body for the opposite usage in the outward perception of carrying out the task, it is evident that someone may acquire a hidden recompense that does not match their work. With human beings this is not possible, but for each individual his recompense is decreed in accordance with the labor of his work. For this reason, the working of the kingdom of heaven and of Gehenna takes place in the hiddenness of the heart, and it is carried out in a manner dissimilar to the actions.

3.98 Beautiful works are one thing, and righteousness another. Beautiful works, however often performed, may be done with a corrupt intention, whereas righteousness consists in the volition: it yearns as it seeks to please the will of God.

3.99 One thing is education by books and knowledge that is acquired by training in them, and another thing is a true understanding of the Scriptures. The former gains strength from persistent

⁵⁴Theodore of Mopsuestia's treatise on the priesthood is lost apart from a few quotations.

study and the labor involved in learning, the latter from the practice of the commandments and the luminous intention that shines out towards God.

3.100 The entire course of the stirrings of the intellect with a spiritual movement is contained in the three kinds of knowledge that are said to be above purity.⁵⁵ With one, a person is trained, with another, perfected, and with the third, crowned. Two of them belong to the course of nature, while one belongs above nature. The first and that following it are “First natural knowledge,” while that by which a person is crowned is called “Second natural knowledge”: this is the precise spiritual mystery of the revered Trinity.

End of the Third Discourse on Knowledge.

⁵⁵The text of the manuscript is disordered here (as the scribe seems to have realized); the passage must originally have read, “The first is called ‘second natural knowledge,’ and that after it ‘first and natural knowledge’; and the one that is being crowned is knowledge of the revered Trinity, the precise spiritual mystery.” (In Kessel’s English translation the disordered text has been silently corrected).

Fourth Discourse of the Headings on Knowledge

4.1 The end of repentance is the beginning of purity; the end of purity is the beginning of luminosity. The path of purity «consists of» labors of virtue, but for a person to be made luminous, this is the work of revelations.

4.2 Purity is the stripping off of the passions; luminosity is the stripping off of suppositions and changes of mind, «resulting» in a precise knowledge of the mysteries.

4.3 What can be perceived of God intellectually—namely, the things that in his love he took upon himself for our advantage—constitutes a type of the perceptible indications, for by means of them the Holy Scripture indicates to our senses what can be understood of the imperceptible world, even though these indications do not properly belong to it. Rather, it is like what God said to Moses, “I am the Lord who was revealed to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as El Shaddai, God; and I did not show them the name ‘Lord.’”¹ The difference between “El Shaddai, God” and “*Ehyeh asher ehyeh*,”² «lies» in the order of learning; it is the same as that between the pointers to our true knowledge concerning them, and the actual reality of the knowledge.

4.4 When all the metaphors used of God encounter reality face to face, they remain outside «that reality», and the intellect only knows him then as being external and prior to these «metaphors», and that the reality of his being is not marked by means of material things in

¹Ex 6.3.

²Ex 3.14 “I am who I am”; the Peshitta transliterates the Hebrew.

the «human» mind. Now God is made known to the bodiless natures³ who exist now in excellence of intellect without «the need for material things».

4.5 None of those things by which God is now made known through nature exists eternally with him, without any beginning; nor will they remain with him as they are without having an end.

4.6 If it is by allegorical indications belonging to «created» nature and subject to time that «we» receive the reality of him who is not confined by time, we should provide a limit to the course of our meditation: it will never be «possible» for us to go beyond these matters to a «stage» the reality of which is not known without intermediaries.

4.7 The fathers speak of the perfection of the stirrings of the mind «as being» the firm second state in the intellect's discoveries following the transmitted order of the journey to purity. These «discoveries», however, are not the crown of the intellect that runs «in the race»;⁴ it is something lower down in the order of transmission, and in the earlier encounters. It «serves as» the educator for what is set out for the learners.

4.8 It is not perfection that crowns the pure intellect, but that which has its eyes on perfection.

4.9 They speak of perfection, and that which precedes this, as being the discoveries of the natural course, within the bounds of purity.

4.10 All those things by which the intellect «progresses» step by step, and is lifted up to the fulfillment of its stirrings, once it encounters the revelation of the summit of mysteries—it is as if they had not come into being at all, they are so swallowed up with the Mediator without being remembered. This is the level that obtains in the boundless state to come.

³I.e., angels.

⁴Cf. 2 Tim 4.7–8.

4.11 The fathers speak of the spiritual perception in the contemplation of corporeal and incorporeal bodies⁵ as being something natural for the rational intellect. And when it ponders on the second *«natural contemplation»*, then “it stands in the fulfilment of the natural stirrings.”⁶ But *«what occurs in the first «natural contemplation» is in second rank after «this» fulfilment, for what is known in that «contemplation» that is second in order, this is said to be a gift beyond nature.*

4.12 Many have supposed that the spiritual mode of being consists in *«having»* a multitude of thoughts on particular subjects, or a fine conception, or well-ordered thoughts, or in meditation on something. And there are people who suppose that it is a flight of fancy entertained by the mind. Others, however, *«hold»* that it consists in some vision visible to the eyes; and there are people who think that it is the attainment of the mind that is deep in wisdom. But they are unaware that none of these things—concept, thought, idea, meditation, or vision—is involved there.

Others, on the basis of a little joy that has burst forth in them, or as a result of fervor of faith, or meditation on the Holy Scriptures, or a slight respite from the passions, have supposed that they have reached the spiritual mode of being; but they do not realize that these and *«other»* similar things are, in comparison to the spiritual mode of being, like a child who does not yet talk compared with a grown person who is instructed and educated in knowledge and literary culture.

Others, because of the abundance of *«their»* prayers and the many labors in which they have excelled, have supposed of themselves that they are living in the spiritual state.

Others, *«again»* have supposed the same, because of the signs and wonders that are performed through their hands, *«or again»* because of their ability to explain things in the future ahead of time,

⁵Cf. Evagrius, *Kephalaia Gnostika* 2.71, 4.62.

⁶Unidentified (not from Evagrius' *Kephalaia Gnostika*).

or because they have received the gift of prophecy, «or again» because of visions and encounters with angels face to face.

Even though all these things are magnificent and wonderful, and anyone who has been worthy of receiving from God a single one of these deserves to be called blessed, nevertheless they are very light when weighed against the magnitude of the spiritual mode of being, and they remain at a great distance from it, being infinitely far removed from the spiritual state. «Furthermore» not everyone who has received these things is even aware of what the spiritual mode of being «really is»—but the person who is held worthy of this state by all means possesses these things too.

4.13 The spiritual mode of being is a «state of» wonder at the mysteries that cannot be learned from human beings, or from angels, but which, through the fulfillment of the commandments, shines out in the soul as a result of «the working of» the Holy Spirit, through insights into the divine mysteries that burst forth in the mind.

4.14 When a person has been held back from sins «which involve» actions, and has overcome the thoughts in the mind that incites them, and has been cleansed of pondering on his struggles, then the mind begins to burst out with stirrings concerning hidden matters. Afterwards it also passes from insights about the corporeal world, and is raised up by meditating on the spiritual beings, its companions, and wonders at God—not at the wonderful things we are familiar with, but at his nature. «This occurs» in the total stillness that falls upon that person. This is the perfected state of the saints in this world; as the fathers say, it is a small taste of the gift that is to come.⁷ These are the revelations of the mysteries of the glory of the New World, which rational human nature is going to enjoy at the resurrection.

4.15 In the spiritual mode of life there is no toil, no battles, no weariness of the body, no struggle with thoughts—no pondering,

⁷Source not identified.

converse, or solicitude over thoughts, because it is not subject to the freedom of the will, nor subject to the reflection on the stirrings of the soul.

Every mode of life that is subject to the authority of the will is involved in battles; it requires toil on the part of the body and of the mind. For this reason, these two modes of life— the practice of virtue and the hidden mode of life of the mind—are followed by the majority of solitaries, in that they are placed under the authority of the will: toil and struggle «exist» in them, and they are confined within meditation and solicitude for the soul; they require training and continual attention to them.

A spiritual stirring is not subject to a person's free will, nor does its cultivation take place by training or learning from others. But because many have thought that this was the case, they perished, imagining that it is the forcefulness of thoughts and the skillful «control» of the will «that produced it».

If the spiritual mode of conduct were acquired by learning and training, by toil and by the will of the soul, all the solitaries beneath the heavens would be conducting their lives on the spiritual level. But as it is, because it is to be found in purity of heart, which is acquired by being distanced from the entire world in body and in mind, scarcely one in ten myriads of solitaries is found to be worthy of the spiritual mode of being during this life.

4.16 There are many others who have been instructed by small pieces of knowledge written down in the books of holy men, and they have embellished their language and delved deeply to speak of them, imagining that they have also in very fact arrived at the spiritual mode of life; but they have not considered or taken into thought that it is not by craft of words and training and learning that this practice becomes known to people: the mysteries of God are not learned through «pen and» ink, but only if they are sown by him in the heart through wondrous insights concerning his majestic being, which spring up in the depths of a pure mind.

4.17 All those who have been instructed concerning the promises by way of hearing and *pen and ink*, and by the senses, have acquired a knowledge of the mystery that is to come, cannot be stirred with insights concerning the New World except by means of things subject to the senses; and even if someone becomes learned and acutely sharp-minded, he certainly will not *really* know this unless he has partaken in a revelation of the Spirit.

4.18 The blessed Paul wrote about many spiritual matters, but a person cannot perceive the things he tasted, unless he has partaken of the Spirit.

4.19 Let that person be seen by you to be worthy of God who fulfills the practice of these divine matters accompanied by the dismal ones; but let that person be considered all the more worthy of attention into whose hands comes the fullness of them accompanied by things that give joy, apart from the *dismal ones*. And even if he be found capable of this, *it will only be so* if he give himself over in obedience.

4.20 A virtuous *act* that ease accomplishes in someone who is called a “laborer,” and “wise in God” belongs to the portion of Satan, and will be rejected by God as accursed. And in cases where it is possible to fulfil this without this being so, and a person hopes to undertake the task without any labor—whether you are speaking of labor of mind or of body at the times when the act is being undertaken—it is not that, when he is involved in laborious *tasks*, that he then thinks “It is something of God,” and that action is properly accomplished. Understand me in these matters, both those that occur with you privately and without others involved, and with those cases where the action is completed in a material way and with others involved.⁸

4.21 Beware of that demonic thought that teaches you folly in the expectation of good things, and shows you a stumbling block on the

⁸Translation uncertain.

pathways to upright knowledge, and things alien to what belongs to Providence, the provider of wisdom.

4.22 Anyone who does not accept with rejoicing the weight, the feeling of sloth and listlessness in the office, and bearing their difficulties while exulting, not to mention the feeling of suffocation and darkness, along with the other painful aspects of the cell, needed for the full service of God, but who longs for complete respite from them, though he does not wish it, he will be handed over to the spirit of fornication. Instead of a pure sacrifice of his body, which because of these things has grown slothful in making offering to God, he will find himself offering daily to Satan with an evil-smelling sacrifice originating from his limbs.

4.23 Believe me, my brother, that listlessness and depression, heaviness of limbs and disturbance and upset of mind, along with the rest of the dismal aspects that are left upon ascetics during a period spent in stillness, are all part of the perfect ministry of God. Do not imagine that the divine ministry consists alone of illumination in the office, chastity of mind, delight and rejoicing of heart, consolation that comes from sweet tears, and luminous converse with God.

Truly and according to my own opinion, I say that even thoughts of blasphemy, vainglory, and the ugly stirrings of fornication, which are in the habit of violently taking hold of solitaries living in stillness, along with the suffering concerning these, even when sometimes a solitary is found to be weak in the face of these, yet he endures while not leaving his cell, this too, with the exception only of pride, is considered a pure sacrifice and a holy and divine ministry, in that he is persevering in the struggle of our Lord in all things on the right and things on the left, which encounter him as he remains in his position, provided it is not as a result of laxity and neglect that these encounters take place, for they press on him under the banner of war. This applies only if he is not vanquished or does not leave the place of struggle. This is perseverance in remaining in the cell. If these things, which are the kinds of struggle that are placed in the

mode of life of solitaries, appear to you in excess for the ministry of God, then how do you dare to hope for the ministry of joy when you do not consider the dismal things involved as being in order?

4.24 If there is anyone among the solitaries who is neglectful, without any excuse of necessity, in the seven offices that are canonically laid down⁹ for the salvation of those who fight with demons, and ‹that person› says to you, “I have escaped from servitude to the spirit of fornication,” and even if he should be an old man, long in this mode of life, whether it is a matter of act or thought, realize in all certitude and without any doubt, that he is completely deceiving you, devising how to cover over his shame and to steal away even the awareness from himself, ‹his aim being› so that he does not have to let go of ease and be subjected to the rule.

4.25 There is a certain divine working that attaches to the pure ministry of solitaries, and from time to time it tabernacles over the solitary in the stillness of the cell; also a certain ineffable joy, without their knowing the reason for it, all of a sudden alights on the heart and removes from it all the usual thoughts at those times. Some of the fathers name that moment as “the luminous region,”¹⁰ while one calls it “the air of freedom,”¹¹ and there is another who speaks of it as “the pure location of ‹human› nature”:¹² ‹the solitary› is as if he were in the New World and inebriated with God in every action that he performs. The ‹solitary› may be in this state of delight over several days, free from struggles; on occasion it may be for as many as six days or even seven. And again, the gift is gathered in from him, then he grows dark. And after some days again, he finds the same thing and he is filled with delight. As long as a solitary finds himself being in this ‹state of› grace, he does not have to be subjected to a

⁹Cf. Canon 8 of *The Canons Ascribed to Mārūthā of Maipherqai*, 98.

¹⁰John of Apamea, *Letters* (ed. Rignell, pp. 57–59); cf. also Basil the Great, *The Syriac Version of the Hexameron by Basil of Caesarea*, trans. Robert W. Thomson, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 551 (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 56.

¹¹Abba Markos (AMS 7:929, 930).

¹²Cf. Mark the Monk, *Justified by Works* 211 (PPS 37:138; SC 445:198, ln. 17).

law, either for the office, or for prayers, or for reading, or for any of the rules that are laid down for created beings, because this is not a matter of his own will.

After departure from that state, if he despises the normal rules laid down for solitaries, he will be handed over to the demons. *‘This will happen’* except in chance cases of necessity, such as when imposed by illness. *‘This applies’* even if he may resemble an angel in his mode of life: even if it does not happen straight away, it most certainly will after a little.

4.26 If such a person should consider the despondency, darkness, and disturbance of mind that are intermingled with a luminous ministry by Providence, as being outside the *‘true’* path and *‘a matter of’* deception, and he teaches and proclaims to you that the unique ordering is full of uninterrupted joy, you should realize that he is causing you to leave the path of God, and is wanting to hand you over to the demons.

4.27 The passions of the body consist in desire, anger, love of idle conversation, etc. They are silenced by fasting, the Office of the Hours, and sitting in stillness. The passions in the soul—that is, distraction without being aware of it, are envy, vainglory, pride, and so on. They are gotten rid of by means of prayer, reading *‘the Scriptures’*, and the understanding that comes from these.

Anyone who wants to still the passions in the body without these, or to overcome ignorance of the mind, wearies himself. By these means even chance empty thoughts will come to an end, the ones from which darkness in the mind is born.

4.28 A single-minded body gives birth to a single-minded mentality. To the extent that the body is mingled *‘with the world’*, so too is the mind.

4.29 Just as a vessel is not cleansed of filth unless it is purged and refined with something astringent or vinegar, so the heart is not

cleansed of the passions if the body is not worn out with vexations and isolation.

4.30 Someone may show you a practice involving limited paths, and from its character and form it will teach you humbleness and understanding, causing you to love God all the more, and familiarizing you, making you to become his close acquaintance; and there is someone *else*, who, because you show much ability, will make you go around the edges of the road, setting a lengthy course before you, and when some opening is set before you, he will prevent you from seeing it, making your course go round in a circular fashion. Both are *directed* towards the one Lord, *coming* from individuals who practice *these paths*, but not everyone sees the one that is limited and close at hand.

Let the person who reads understand the sequence of the chapters.

4.31 Nothing is more beloved to God or precious in the eyes of the angels—or that brings Satan low and is fearsome to demons causing sin to tremble, that bursts forth with knowledge and draws on to compassion, wipes out sins and causes one to acquire humility, makes wise the heart, and provides for comfort as it unifies the intellect—than a solitary kneeling on the ground, who is found to be in prayer continually. This is the haven of repentance, to which all assembled thoughts of contrition are gathered together with tears; it is a treasure-house of pity, the washing clean of the heart, the path of purity, the road of revelations, the ladder of the intellect. This causes the mind to have a likeness to God and grants it to resemble what is in the future in its stirrings. This repays the debt of long neglect in a short time. This comprises within its boundaries the various distinctive kinds of labors. There is nothing so important as continuity of psalmody in a modest manner. If a person disdains *psalmody* as something a little less *important*, being devoured by a desire for this *kind of* veneration,¹³ he will no longer be considered as negligent,

¹³“Veneration”: *segdta*, which can also mean “prostration.”

but rather as someone raised up to a more excellent level, to a greater task, having received, as a more internalized charism, a ministry even more intensive and closely associated with God.

Neglect of the Psalms is something worthy of blame when someone ceases from *reciting* them out of pride, and out of disdain, following the heretical manner of certain Messalians; or it may be out of laxity that someone ceases from fulfilling *the psalmody*. But to confine the limiting of them on the grounds of the humbleness of incessant veneration is the fullness of that kind of labor, and not idleness—far from it! This also subdues the body, while it gives new kinds of wisdom to the mind through the spirit of charisms, and by means of its cries of “Holy,” it sanctifies it. *Prostration* is more laborious than any other practice; but because it causes consolation to spring up close at hand, it makes the labors involved like honey and a honeycomb to the person who bears them when he becomes aware of the sweet delight of what is in the labors; because of this he is even content to accept the cross.

4.32 Purity of prayer is the silence of the converse of bodily thoughts and the pressing stirring of things that are the delight of the soul.

4.33 Purity of heart consists in luminosity of intention without *involving* any struggle; it acquires constant involuntary impulses concerning hidden matters, and a diminishing of memories of things that belong to the flesh that are traced out in the mind.

4.34 You should not *wait* until you are purified from distraction of thoughts and only then have a desire to pray; rather, it is as a result of constancy of prayer and much toil over this that distraction will be dispersed from the mind. Whereas, if you *wait* until you see the mind completely raised up above all recollection of this world and *only*, then begin on prayer, you will not ever pray!

For it is as a result of prayer that there occurs to the mind something such as they¹⁴ tell of—namely, that for those who have labored in *prayer* for a long time and discovered of themselves genuine

¹⁴I.e., the fathers.

excellence—and this, only just so, and for short periods, and not always, but once every so often; during the extent of the prayer these things occur to the mind, according to what they say.

For before prayer a person should ask for these things. Indeed we have never heard of dispassion issuing from the mind. And if a person waits until the mind is raised up from images of all that is here (on earth), he will not pray at all, or venerate, or supplicate. Such a person is asking for perfection before any ascetic practice!

Suppose this can happen at all, that the mind remains in silence without the distraction of everything that is here (on earth), and the recollection of this, then there would not even be any necessity for prayer in that the mind would have been perfected, and the person would have become in God, and God in him.

Tell me, then, if you are blatantly asking for this: Do you desire all the time to be like this, or from time to time? If from time to time, this would be bad on your part, for you would be asking for just a part of something that can be continuous. But if continually, realize henceforth that you are desiring the perfection to come, like the opinion of the Messalians!

4.35 Not to consent to the things that are shown to the mind when we pray is in our power; but for the mind to remain in silence, with those demons who show us the images, ejected from it, and for it to be raised up above the struggle against images, this is not something within the power of human nature.

But if you want your mind to be partially held back from distraction, and you wish to give space for pure prayer, then hold yourself back from material objects and concern over superfluous matters, along with the distraction of the senses. For insofar as these grow less, so you will find space away from distraction for pure prayer. This will be in part, and not fully so; but it will provide a little respite if accompanied by constant carefulness. Nor will we be judged because of this and be asked why images of the thoughts are stirred in us. Thus we will have either judgement or grace, depending

on whether we consent, or do not consent, whether we fight, or give way to them.

4.36 I have said this, not *‘wanting’* to give a hand to distraction or to give *‘free’* license to the mind, or to show that the blow resulting from it as easy, but I am warning that we should not desist from prayer because of *‘distraction’*. Nor should we cease from supplication on the grounds that we are not worthy, or that we are fine as we are, but rather, while humbling ourselves and being aware of the slackness of our *‘human’* nature—in that we are not capable of anything out of our own strength—let us hold ourselves to be wretched, and approach prayer as people always guilty before him who is all-capable, as we cry out, together with the children in the furnace—they being innocent, whereas we are guilty—confessing “We have sinned and done wrong before you. To you, Lord, belongs the victory in all things, whereas we are shamefaced:¹⁵ we cannot open our mouth before you because of the shame and disgrace of our sins.”¹⁶ And with the consecrated Jeremiah¹⁷ let us, the impure, cry out, “You, Lord, are forever, and your throne is for generation after generation. Do not abandon us forever, or forget us for length of days; turn us towards you, Lord, and let us be turned around.”¹⁸

Therefore, with all these things, we strike out,¹⁹ and we pray, we are wounded, and we pray; we are innocent, and we pray; we are wallowing in guilt, and we pray; we are bespattered with the blood of our wounds, and we pray; we lie fallen, and we pray; the Lord gives us joy, and we pray; we are in the dark, and we pray; by all means, let us not cease from prayer on the grounds that we are not worthy, or are not in the right state for prayer. For our Lord said “The healthy do not need a doctor.”²⁰ But because we are sick, this makes it all the more pressing that we should hasten to him and appear before him

¹⁵Dan 3.19, 29 (LXX, Peshitta).

¹⁶Cf. Dan 3.33 (LXX, Peshitta).

¹⁷Cf. Jer 1.5.

¹⁸Lam 5.19–21.

¹⁹See Textual Notes.

²⁰Mt 9.12.

in supplication. If we have distraction, or have fallen, or have sicknesses, let us commit them all to God in prayer.

Ceasing from prayer is a definition of obedience to «Satan» by whom we are oppressed: as long as we complain against him it indicates that we are not enfeebled, but completely willing for what concerns «prayer».

4.37 The lesser amount or the harshness of recompense «at the judgment» does not depend only on the quantity and kinds of sins, but, for the greater part, on the amount of understanding; perhaps also according to temperaments, «apart from» causes and times. A person is judged more in comparison with secondary matters, by the weight of primary ones.

4.38 Nothing is more dear to God, or provides a speedier response from him to our request than when a person begs for forgiveness of his transgressions and «for» strength and assistance in rectifying them. This also readily holds back punishment for them, even if «the sins» are very serious; without doubt, he whose concern it is that we should be set aright, will also receive that person's requests. But if, in supplications for forgiveness, the mind is not mingled with intercession for being set aright, then the supplications for forgiveness will not be accepted, and that person will not be held back from punishment: even if he multiplies prayer, it will not be heard. «This is so» in order to prevent that person being an excuse for others to imitate, when he is forgiven without any repayment.

4.39 With every chastisement or oppressive event that is in the guise of a punishment, where the intention of its sender is to cause destruction, it insistently presses hard with its assaults, and is full of threats, without any change; or if there is a change, it is for a greater misfortune, without any moderation. But that «chastisement» that is for admonition and rectification, bears mercy as its intention, mingled with relief and affliction equally: it is insistent, but then it

moderates. The other kind has only one form, and it is replete with all kinds of hardships.

You should understand the same thing with hidden battles: in the case of one that is vexatious for a while, and *then* lets up for a while, one day harassing, another resting, recognize that anyone experiencing this is travelling on the common course, which involves training and learning.

But where afflictions and tribulation without any change attach themselves to a person, this is a sign of abandonment by God. I am not speaking of the battle that *comes* from lassitude, or the vexation that comes from relaxing—for these should not properly be called “battles” at all, but they apply to those who are standing in position in wariness, and who guard with care the senses along with the thoughts: these are people who *in the course of* providence are involved in battles.

There are also vexations that *result* from lack of knowledge in a person’s mindset, and from darkness, depression, and upsetting sadness. There is no end for this vexation in someone who lacks endurance, whereas a wise mindset knows how to drive away these things with humility and thanksgiving, showing obedience to the advice of people of knowledge who have *experienced* battles *of this sort*. *This applies* even if they may appear to be uneducated in comparison with others with regard to literary education and training in speaking.

4.40 Knowledge about *spiritual* battles is one thing, whereas knowledge that comes from education and sharp-wittedness is something different. Knowledge about battles requires experience. How often those who possess intelligence and wisdom from their education are upset in the face of this *knowledge*, whereas the uneducated and rustic in *academic* knowledge possess the *other kind* through practice.

4.41 Just as you cannot learn the art of archery in the midst of crowds and in the street, but only in a location that is completely

clear and empty—somewhere suitable for horse-racing and shooting off arrows, so that the course of the arrow speeds unhindered to the fixed target—so it is not possible for a person to learn well the art of spiritual battles and their course, requiring skill, directed towards the divine target, or to learn the art of handling thoughts and the skill of spiritual navigation in this fearsome sea, how to recognize the tricks and many clever devices of Satan, unless that person remains in constant stillness, emptied of everything by which the mind is held and made useless, not ceasing from continual supplication. Anyone who does not act in this way will fall.

4.42 All the labor of this unified way of life in stillness exists with three summits: an initial summit, a middle summit, and a summit of completion. Attached to that first one is fear and the refining suffering of sorrow, which is due to recollections of matters that have taken place in the past before, and the state of terror that is justly attached to them. The sign of the next one consists in enticements and the various consolations by which means a person approaches the charisms that come through the purity that the wise penitent acquires from weeping and contrition.

4.43 When, by means of continual stillness, laborious ascesis, and pondering over his sins, which afflicts and causes suffering, a person has completed this stage, he is usually accompanied from this point on by extended weeping. Having completed it, accompanied by frequent labors and various forms of penitence, he will have begun, with the assistance of Christ our hope, to make progress on the second stage, the aim of his repentance being involuntarily turned to exultation, in that he is vigilant and in fear lest it be an illusion.

4.44 The sign of the second summit is this: once hope peers out in the mind and, by means of its repentance, little by little consolation begins to be mingled in, with every now and then joy-making thoughts bursting forth, a person sees in himself that he is easily able to gather up his mind from distraction. When these things have fully

entered in a person at this summit, one way of thinking is changed into another, and the normal thought process is *altered* into another one that is unlike it: what falls into the mind does not belong to *human* nature, and a person begins to get a glimpse, too, into mystical insights that are hidden in the Psalms and the *scriptural* reading—as well as in the other matters subject to sense perception, and the contemplation of the labors of their practice: sweetness begins to be mixed into his practice, whether in his fasting, or in the words of his office, and other tasks of his mode of life. The moment he has begun on prayer, the senses withdraw without being willed to do so, and thoughts begin to concentrate, having become aware of a certain liberating atmosphere raised up above the struggles: that person sees the ship of his mind travelling calmly, through growth in prayer and virtues, advancing day by day. These, together with other things even greater, belong to this middle summit, until that person is raised up by the gift of Christ's compassion to the mode of life that is beyond *human* nature.

4.45 As long as you are still on the first summit, more than anything else, labor on the drawn-out Office of the Psalms, with much repetition, and the labor of the reading of the Scriptures. Attached to this *there should be* extended *periods of* hunger, which cleanses and purifies the body with its heat. This, more than all *other* labors is sufficient for *God* to grant forgiveness of former sins by means of the laborious hardships that constitute the mighty strength of repentance, while those former habits by which you got accustomed to shameful acts of transgression, are brought low by hunger.

4.46 When, with heavenly assistance, you have already come close to the second summit, according to the words of the fathers,²¹ and you have begun to become aware in yourself of reaching it by the signs previously indicated to you, certain of which you see in yourself, *then* slightly lessen your former labors, while not cutting off the roots of their continuity, but exchanging them little by little for

²¹ Cf. John of Apamea, *On the Soul* (ed. Dederling, p. 23; tr. Hansbury, p. 52).

various other things, laboring more with prayers and supplications, rather than with Psalms. Not that you should cease from them, but giving more space to <prayers and supplications>. Also, in the office make sufficient space for these, rather than repetition—apart from those in the other Hours.

From this point on you will see the freedom of speech that you are receiving day by day in prayer, with your heart receiving strength over thoughts, the passions being subdued, and your mind continually rejoicing, rejuvenated in prayer. You will see yourself moment by moment as if you had become someone else through the renewal that you are receiving with the assistance of grace, and <you will see> the divine power tabernacling over you in the stillness that is preserved.

4.47 Once a person has begun on the mode of life that belongs to the mind, one that consists in the constant meditation on divine matters, until he reaches the spiritual mode of life that consists in wonder at God, more than all other labors, there is need for urgent prayers, carried out kneeling, while fasting does not cease at all, taking nourishment sufficient <only> for the body to survive amid such great labor of prayers.

But when someone has approached the meeting point with that third summit, and has begun to tread on its boundary, he will be found to be outside the entire mode of life <involving> constraint. Things that he fulfilled previously under constraint, he is now drawn towards by the force of delight, ceasing from <any sense of> constraint: wonder draws him on to things that are beyond the control of the will; for he finds himself continually prostrate on the ground as a result of the delight at the insights <received>. Neither thought nor the senses <are involved> in the prayer; there is no distraction there, no meditation; nevertheless, sense perception is <still> present there.

I am not speaking of the total wonder that exists in the revered nature of the Lord of lords, <where> the mind is raised up above things below, utterly above sense perception; rather, I am talking

about the wonder of God's dispensation, full of different forms, which «spans all» ages and generations, «the wonder» that falls upon the soul at the things effected in a special way for a person each day and all the time, whether in a hidden or in an open manner.

4.48 When the intellect is stirred by grace in spiritual matters through the sweetness of knowledge, it remains without thought and recollections for a considerable time, being still and astonished. I am not speaking about that totally collected state when the stirrings of the mind are changed into wonder in divine contemplation; rather, it remains without any stirrings for the entire day, or two or more. For a person «engaged» in one of the «forms of» contemplation or other revelations, this is not the total cessation of thought, or the departure of human nature from knowledge to a non-knowledge that is superior to knowledge, as the fathers say.²² Rather, «it occurs» with an inebriation and warmth of heart, accompanied by peace and joy.

Total wonder at prayer and complete unawareness of things here «on earth» do not «occur» in any of the forms of spiritual knowledge and delights apart from «this» one. For the rest, even if wonder should be with someone and the palate of a person's mind tastes spiritual delight, he is not outside cognizance of the here «and now», but the thoughts are gathered in within him, being still from «their» customary pondering. Cognizance is preserved with that person: he knows, hears, and perceives, but «his mind» is completely gathered in from distraction, and is not turned towards meditation on anything, except on that delight of the spiritual understanding that has fallen upon him. «Such a person» marvels, standing in silence, or prostrate on the ground, at the force of this ineffable sweetness, for the body does not endure supporting it, in that its senses shrink back, leaving just its limbs; without willing it, that person falls on his face, while in his mind he is lifted up from these earthly things, and it is as though

²²This refers to “Dionysius the Areopagite”; cf. *Dionigi Areopagita. Nomi divini, teologia mistica, epistole: la versione siriana di Sergio di Reš'aynā (VI secolo)*, ed. Emiliano Fiori, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 657 (Leuven: Peeters, 2014), 128, index, s.v. *agnosia*.

his ship were at rest in the mode of life to come, there being a certain obscure perception, without thought of anything here «on earth». «This happens» to such extent that he is drawn on by the delight in the spiritual understanding that peers out at him. Those who have had an experience of this in themselves know what I am talking about: this is how matters are.

For «human» nature to be outside thoughts, cognizance, and sense perception for a period of days, as it is written concerning the fathers, is something that occurs only with a perception that is «focused» on God. For everything else, even though the mind is stilled, it «still» has a perception of what is here «on earth». «Perception focused» on God is when a revelation occurs for the intellect: no «other sort of» perception remains in it.

4.49 Corresponding to the decrease of thoughts of the world in the mind, so the gate opens up before you, «leading» to joy in our Lord. Until you «actually» become aware of this joy, there is no way your mind will be capable of continual recollection in prayer. All the holy fathers have found the diminution of the struggle with thoughts to be rest from distraction through the diminution of the thoughts themselves. But when thoughts reside in large numbers in the mind, so that they find that concentration of the mind in prayer takes the form of a struggle, they have not been able «to prevail» by their own strength until the thoughts, by becoming less there, have provided stillness. This cannot happen amid constant encounters with people and human affairs.

But if you say “I am not capable of all this continual confinement without end, or remoteness from the world sitting «in the cell,” then, my brother, persevere; do not ask for something that those who go about «raised» above the world have acquired—namely, stillness from the thronging of thoughts—which is the cause of joy and concentration at the time of prayer on a single thought that yearns for the things of God. From here «that person» is held worthy of purity of heart, for continuously he is undertaking the journey from the

world, the will not being involved, by means of the continual *«sense»* in the mind of resting in God.

Corresponding to the location of where someone is residing, thoughts will diminish or multiply, and a person is brought either to purity or to an increased struggle.

4.50 How often does a solitary become aware of stirrings of thoughts *«raised»* above the flesh as a result of the distance of where he resides, even if he is wanting in *«bodily»* labors: this is because of being dead to human *«company»*.

4.51 To the extent to which a person is distanced from the settled world, and is withdrawn to the wilderness and wasteland, his heart being aware of the distance from all human nature, so he will receive stillness from thoughts. For in the wilderness, my brother, we do not have much vexation from thoughts, nor do we weary ourselves over much struggle with them. For the very sight of the wilderness naturally deadens the heart in the face of worldly stirrings, and it restrains *«the heart»* from the persistence of thoughts.

4.52 Just as the sight of someone standing beside smoke cannot become clear unless that person distances himself and moves away from there, so it is not possible to acquire purity of heart and stillness from the thoughts without the solitary life being distanced from the smoke of the world, which wafts in before the senses and blinds the eyes of the soul.

4.53 Let no one display an empty knowledge, or argue against this. When we are in an inhabited location, thoughts of that inhabited place will occur to us, and when we are in the wilderness, thoughts of the wilderness will occur to us. When we are with many people, thoughts of the many people will occur to us, but when we are isolated from all, we will acquire a thought *«process»* that is left in solitude.

What are the thoughts of the wilderness? *«They are»* the stirrings that issue from a mortified heart. For once we *«find ourselves»* with

stirrings that are dead to the world, it is not possible that we will not be stirred in God: stillness from worldly stirrings will necessarily give space for impulses that are in God, and *along* with the body's weariness we acquire a mind that is left in solitude.

4.54 In these places you will ruin your body with afflictions and labors, because when your body collapses, it will not come again to slackness through concerns, or be filled with passions. That is, in deserted regions like this, purity will remain with the *body*. Thus we are able not to be devoid of our former labors, and by means of the stillness from thoughts that tabernacles over us in the wilderness, we will quickly enter into a freedom of the soul that is above the world, and receive in our soul all the time divine intimations through the renewal of the mind, and be readily receptive of God's gift.

4.55 If, my brother, you see that, as a result of labors and the vexations of stillness and solitude, your soul shrinks, saddened concerning this life because it sees that life has begun henceforth to become diminished because of the body, which has already given an opportunity²³ to give up, and you see that the thought has grown weak at the sight of this, place in opposition to it some upright thought and the concept of the fear of God. It is he who exists in truth, and you will comfort yourself, knowing that a little life *spent* in righteousness in accordance with the will of God is more worthwhile than drawn-out days spent in provoking *God* to anger. Recollect, too, the lives of the saints of old, who did not consider themselves in comparison with the will of God, and living like this they all persevered, whether in some inhabited place, or in the desert, until they left it and they changed this body of humble state²⁴ for they were scarcely able, because of it, to complete the path of the fear of God. When the time approached for them to depart from the world, they were greatly rejoicing in that they were able, by means of small afflictions here, to escape from the evils that were fighting to destroy the soul.

²³Lit. hand.

²⁴Cf. Phil 3.21.

At the time of their departure they were found to be in the household of God.

4.56 If you are desirous of being raised above the passions, first learn about the snares in the battle. So let me tell you something: pay attention. In the struggle do not attempt to vanquish the passions: they will not be vanquished. Rather, do all you can to make the passions weaker. Do not fight with them, as the unskilled do; you will never enter into purity of soul in *such* a battle. Someone who wishes to enter the region of purity in this manner will never become aware of any peace of thoughts, for he will not be raised up above the mind's commotion and attain to the regions of limpidity. You, however, should hold back nourishment from the passions, for this is the aim of *our* craft: observe each one of them, how they are nourished, and *then* act in a clever way against them. Once the passions have been weakened, thoughts will have diminished—for they are their smoke-screen; and the mind will be stilled from *any* irruption.

Once the mind has been pacified, it is easy for it to recollect itself within its *proper* region, and for *human* nature to see itself: through the concentration of the mind we will readily enter purity through the gift of Christ.

4.57 As long as someone stands in battle and is still fighting away, it is not possible that he should encounter the light of the mind or become aware of peace of thoughts. There is no good news on the day of battle, as Qohelet said,²⁵ and everything that is accomplished by these divine things is carried out with much labor and affliction, while there is no comfort at all yet in any of a person's labors; whether he approaches prayer, or the office, or ascetic practice, he is *only* able to accomplish these out of constraint, in that all his practice is still *accompanied by* listlessness. He may receive a little consolation from reading *Scripture*, but sometimes even in this he grows dark because he is still travelling in the region of darkness in his ministry with respect to God; also it is the time of the testing of the soul,

²⁵Eccles 8.8.

during which the will of a person is tested by dismal matters «which are» for the sake of these divine ones, «to see» whether they endure gladly the afflictions that are for the sake of truth, affecting both the body and the mind. But when, by the grace of God, the time of struggle has passed from them, then they enter in their soul to the place of joy, and every day that passes over them they find a wondrous change in themselves, according to the word of the fathers. And until a person is raised up from this place of struggles, he will not even find true comfort; nor will anyone who is totally filled with listlessness be raised up from a way of life lived under constraint.

4.58 When the solitary has passed on to another «stage» and becomes aware of the respite from the passions, then he encounters the light of the mind, and through peace from thoughts he is held worthy of concentration of the intellect, and in this concentration of the intellect he enters into this “light of the mind,”²⁶ of which the fathers speak.

The turbulence «caused» by many thoughts is a sign of a multitude of passions.

4.59 Purity is «human» nature’s place of stillness, in front of which the door of the passions is closed. Unless someone has opened this door, he will not enter this natural state of stillness. And if someone is held worthy of reaching this far, such a person has, I think, received an awareness of his renewal, by means of the pure intimations that are set in motion in his mind.

4.60 At the moment when a person ceases from belonging to the level of being a combatant, once he has entered the next level, then he begins on the priesthood of the intellect, which is the level of the way of life of the inner person.²⁷

²⁶E.g., Eusebius, *Theophania* 4.12; Narsai, ed. A. Mingana, 1:349; cf. *Paradise of the Fathers* (AMS 7:655).

²⁷Cf. John the Solitary, *Briefe von Johannes dem Einsiedler*, ed. L. G. Rignell (Lund: A.-B. Ph. Lindstedts Univ.-Bokhandel, 1941), 41–42.

4.61 Once a person has, through divine assistance, become recollected from external concerns, and from being “multiple” he has become a “single” person, then from this point on he will begin to see in himself things that are new, and find in himself in a hidden way perceptible intimations and signs. Then, from here he will have a taste, in symbol, of that Renewal of which, at the end of time, the entire community of human beings will be held worthy. This is because many times, including in the midst of the hours of daytime, he perceives in himself that the mind is concentrated into itself, without any concern for itself, through an inexplicable silence. Let the reader understand! This happens to such a person even in the office, and at the time of reading Scripture.

The dreams and stirrings during sleep of those who have been held worthy of purity of soul are also separate from those of people who are subject in their minds to the passions, or who are still engaged in battle against them.

4.62 When you are desirous of knowing at what stage you are, or whether your soul is standing on the right road, or outside of it, then test yourself for stability or deficiency in prayer, for this serves as a mirror for the soul: with the reflection of its defects or beauty, the false or beautiful state of thought will be revealed. This will search out whether it is disdainful or eager, whether a person is laboring only in the body, or only in the mind, or in both; whether a person is mentally cut off from the world, or is bound up with a particular person or matter. At the time of prayer, it will be clearly seen by a person by what he is stirred, and what stirrings the mind comes up with, whether concerned with God, or with matters of human nature and with the world; whether it is strong or weak against the passions.

All these matters you should seek to examine in yourself in prayer more than at any other time. If you are attentive, I will tell you about these things, also because it is easy to doubt your ability to attain to the narrow path of your mode of life. At a time of laxness, some of

the passions are manifest—if a person is not blind! Even apart from the times of prayer they will recognize *⟨this⟩* in themselves. But *⟨what I have to say⟩* is reserved for after a long period spent in the conduct of stillness. For there the paths are narrow and a person will fall into doubts whether he is *⟨progressing⟩* well or badly.

4.63 We should also recognize the following: that consolation granted to someone in prayer and in the office is better than *⟨consolation⟩* that comes from reading or from the sight of the created world, although these too are a huge measure *⟨of consolation⟩*. There are also separate *⟨kinds of consolation⟩*: the consolations that people who are advanced *⟨in experience⟩* receive also come from the Scriptures and verses that cause them wonder; it is *⟨different⟩* for those that console and give joy to people at an intermediary stage. But understand: the consolation that a solitary receives, when it come from external things, with the movement of the tongue, or the sight or hearing, is lesser than *⟨the consolation⟩* that is without any mediator, but *⟨comes⟩* from a singly-focused heart, or through prayer that is more interior than that on the lips;²⁸ or it all of a sudden falls into the mind and is revealed to him without any material *⟨intervention⟩*; this is a revelation of the Spirit and a type of prophecy, for the heart indeed prophesies, in that what the Spirit reveals to that person concerns hidden matters over which not even the Holy Scriptures have authority, something that it is not permitted even to Scripture to reveal, whereas a pure mind does have the authority to know more than what has been entrusted to Scripture. But the fountainhead of all these things is *⟨spiritual⟩* reading, and from it comes beauty of mind.

Elucidation: All these things are born from *⟨spiritual⟩* reading, and pure prayer is also born from reading; *⟨likewise⟩* recollectedness of mind is from reading. From it all these things

²⁸Cf. John the Solitary, *On Prayer* 2: “this spiritual prayer is more interior than the tongue, more deeply interiorized than anything on the lips, more interiorized than any words or vocal song.” Sebastian Brock, “John the Solitary, ‘On Prayer,’” *The Journal of Theological Studies* 30.1 (1979): 84–101, at 97.

are transmitted and come to an awareness in the mind. Every prayer that is not born as a result of much persistence in reading is like a body without legs that wants to run! I am talking about «spiritual» reading that is appropriate for these minds, and stirs «them» up with its insights with this in aim.

4.64 Because we are about to speak on topics concerning prayer, we will briefly distinguish the stages in prayer, seeing that many people are desirous to know «where» their soul stands in «relation» to the «stages» that become known in prayer. Become refined in your stirrings, purify and gather in your mind from distraction; we should also have special concern for the intellect until we cross over into this astonishing staging-post, which is the «ultimate» resting place of this mode of life. Within it is located the divine resting. For the entire steadfast course «leading» to the excellence of human conduct, found in those who have despised the spectacle of things visible and subject to corruption, focuses on this: to become worthy of pure prayer and to find delight in it.

4.65 First of all, keep this reminder in your mind: we are not prepared to speak of matters that are above «human» nature, but those that belong to it and are situated on the level of pure prayer. Many are in doubt over these things, in that the majority of the eager and enlightened brethren are «involved» with them. These are people who live at this staging-post, each travelling on one or other path in accordance with the variety of each individual's measure. In the case of a person who is wary and has a rule of prayer and is a disciple of stillness, this is for him to read. But someone with another mode and form of life, at another stage—the toil of investigation into these matters will be seen as an empty occupation, having to keep to the limitations of his mind in prayer and to learn about the change(s) of stirrings.

Observe, then, and examine the flow of the mind at times of prayer: what is the aim of its course? «Look and» see, does its prayer flow strongly and copiously? Or is it short and curtailed, this last resulting from the mind's stammering? Or is it held back from

progressing onwards by the strong light of insight? On *one* occasion a person's prayer may be flowing, on another it is different; sometimes his prayer is calm, at another agitated and fervent; sometimes he may pray from the depth of the mind, and sometimes *coming* from the flow of thoughts; sometimes it issues out of the person's groans, and sometimes unbearable impulses burst out from within.

The measure of each person is clear from these differences that take place, likewise *the measure of each is clear* from which of these conditions is dominant as a result of the chance stirrings that occur. Also, from the continuity of the stirrings, a person realizes that he is standing at the level of repentance, or whether he has begun to see the radiance of his soul; or is travelling on *just the first* half of the road to repentance, or has completed it and begun to receive the pledge of delights—that is, the charisms *that come* after repentance.

But all these things *only* apply to the eager, for there is no share in a single one of these matters just mentioned for the lax. But to those who take trouble over matters of prayer and the rule concerning this, it is a matter of necessity to *proceed with* care.

But let us come to what is the truth *of the matter* and briefly shed light on the stages that are lesser than the exalted ones.

4.66 The frequency of stirrings in prayer is not the most elevated part in pure prayer, even though it is beautiful, but it belongs to fervor. When this occurs with repentance in mind, and is mingled with suffering, or is followed by joy, this is excellent, but it belongs to the second and third level. I am not saying that you are travelling without any path when you experience these things, but I mean that they are not the greatest, but belong to the intermediate *stage*. The most precious and important *features* in pure prayer *consist* in the paucity and brevity of stirrings, and the fact that the mind gazes, as it were in wonder, at the paucity *of these* in prayer. From here on, one of two things happens to the mind during that brief stirring that arises in it: either it will draw back into silence, because of the power of the understanding that the intellect has received in a verse *of the*

Psalms), or it is held in a state of pleasure at what has been stirred for the purpose of the prayer, and the heart, without moving on to something else, cultivates it with an insatiable desire of love.

These are the principal *features* of pure prayer, and these intimations will be yours at the time of prayer. Observe in which of these distinct *stages* the mind is, in these *various* parts of prayer—in the first, or in those that come after?

4.67 The extent of the words of prayer with which the heart overflows in abundance, and the frequency of the various stirrings, are a sign of fervor and an indication that the mind has not yet become aware of the light in *the words*, and has not received the experience of the understanding that lights up the interior eye at the time of prayer, and it receives strength from the things that the heart, or the lips, pour forth.

If the mind becomes aware of a certain force that is praying and becomes illumined by the truth within the words, this is a sign, for *this* awareness does not allow *that person* to travel onwards and to add to the wealth of the words, but it at once ties him to one *or other* of the two *possibilities* that we have explained a little earlier.

4.68 We should also know this: that the extent and length of prayer does not come from the abundance of words and the length and variety of the verses *involved*, but from the fountain of knowledge and the power of the verses revealed to the mind at that moment. From this we should learn that when the mind lights up in prayer, insight does not dawn for it in all the words of the supplication and in all the verses of the office *Psalms*, but a single short verse on its own can receive power and illumine, and from that verse by which the mind has become illumined, it turns to an awareness *of it*.

Up to that point the flow *of words* was bursting forth and issuing, but as long as the illumination from that verse is present in the mind, *human* nature does not have the strength to leave it and pass on to the next verse. But if the *light* is removed from *the verse*, then *the mind* is able to pass on to other *verses*. In each one where

it is illumined, it remains there, standing in tranquility. «In such a case» when the mind is functioning well, where «is the place for» a flow of copious stirrings, with long phrases and a run of varied verses? If this is the case, when someone has prayed with exactitude «and» with an openness of intention, he will not be able to return to quantities of «verses».

4.69 In this I am not praising any lameness of mind, but «am referring to» the fact that «the mind» is held back from its flow by some great illumination. Nor do I reject copiousness of prayer, or hold anyone back from the length of the office; rather, I am bringing into the light the excellent level involved, and demonstrating the gifts to be found in them, providing a sign of the stage of mind of certain individuals in prayer or during the office. For this reason it is not in the abundance of the verses in prayer and the wealth of words that we should look for the light of our mind at the time of supplication; rather, even if it is limited, it will be readily seen that the mind receives strength in it, and turns back to the delight that «exists» within these words that are provided as a tool for prayer, and through them as intermediaries the intellect receives an outpouring of words transcending composition, for within them is placed the silence «that belongs» to intuitions—which «constitutes» the proper prayer of the incorporeal nature within us—namely, the mind endowed with understanding.

4.70 We should not get despondent at the length of the office and the drawn-out «nature» of our prayers, or at much repetition in them. For it is as a result of the labor in the repetition of the words, and perseverance in the slowness involved in them, that the matters I have been talking about have been born. However, we should realize that we ought not to consider these same things to be like fruits to grab hold of, but like a rootstock, for without them no fruit will appear and fall into our hands. We should realize, too, that, just as fruit is sought by us every day so that we may be nourished all the time and enjoy it, so these matters are also the rootstock, and if we

despise them and uproot them as not being of use, we will also be deprived of the fruit that from time to time is wont to appear in their midst. Not a single person, as long as he is clothed in the flesh, should abandon the unchanging continuity in them.²⁹ Let no one be upset here: they have a final purpose.

4.71 A person who has attained to a certain measure and has acquired a yearning for God, should not, after abandoning the world, remain for a long time in the community, with its daily business involving many people. But after a short while, once he has learned the conduct of the brotherhood, the role of the monastic habit, and the manner of its humble state, he should separate himself so as to be alone in the cell, in order not to acquire the habit of being with many people. The simplicity of the novitiate should be changed to astuteness, avoiding the company of the lax brothers who are amongst us. I have seen many, who at the beginning of their leaving the world, on first coming to the house of the brethren, were pure and innocent, but after a time, as a result of being in the community a great deal, they became cunning and impudent, failing to recover once more that initial innocence.

Accordingly, let this person restrict himself to converse with just a single elder, one about whom there is testimony of a good way of life and a knowledge of stillness: he should have converse with him alone, and so be trained and learn the way of life of stillness. He should have converse with no one else from then on. In this way in a short time he will be held worthy of a taste of knowledge.

4.72 After God has held you worthy of the gift of stillness, so that you live by yourself, it is not for you to get distracted reading many books: it is not by much learning or a variety of books that luminosity occurs, but with a careful concern over prayer. What is the use of the knowledge of many books and their interpretations for collectedness of mind and purity in prayer?

²⁹I.e., length of office, etc.

Truly, every solitary, who, after abandoning the way of life of the world, reads any book apart from those concerning the mode of life of solitaries, whether he is a student or whether a layman, first of all, he has lost sight of the aim of the path of the solitaries, and then his mind is turned aside to seek for enjoyment in them, even if they raise you up to heaven. It does not help you to read books, apart from those that teach concerning the way of life of those who are strangers to the world. The books of the New Testament are sufficient and those that concern the mode of life of solitaries, sufficient—that is, for perfection of knowledge and luminosity of mind. After you have arrived at luminosity, just a little, read and you will not be harmed. See, I have testified to you everything!

Elucidation: With respect to the summit on which a person stands, our love counsels him to stick to the book that is appropriate to the purpose, and with respect to the spiritual sickness specified. There is a person who has arrived more or less at healthiness of soul, and he benefits from everything. These pieces of advice are for those whose aim is to be a “mourner”³⁰ with a desire for purity.

4.73 If you are seeking for true consolation in prayer, take care of your conscience. Do you want your conscience to be set right? Take care over prayer. Care over each one of these effects purity in its companion: the setting right of conscience makes for purity of prayer, and purity of prayer grants freedom of speech for the conscience.

4.74 Purity is not preserved alongside mixing in with company, nor is the recollection of God with thinking about many matters and involvement in different affairs. There are many people with a desire for righteousness who throw themselves into commotion of this sort, leaving aside the greater part of righteousness: they are thinking that all the different kinds of righteousness and all our Lord's commandments were intended for a single person, and the

³⁰The *abile*, “mourners,” were a special category of ascetics.

person who keeps them, is under obligation to perform them all. They are unaware that each one of our Lord's commandments was spoken with reference to a «specific» category «of people», or that not all the commandments are useful for a single individual. Otherwise, how is “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” like “Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the children of God.”³¹ How can someone living in «the state of» mourning, lamenting and weeping night and day, give himself over to going around making peace between the enraged, and bringing about peace between many?

Or how do “Be wakeful, praying at every moment”³² and “Enter your chamber and close your door: pray to your Father in secret”³³ resemble “I was sick and you visited me, and I was a stranger and you gathered me in, I was in prison and you came to me”?³⁴ How can someone who is bidden to keep vigil and pray in his chamber visit the sick, wander around prisons, or take care of strangers?

Rather, “Enter your chamber, keep vigil and pray in secret to God” is linked with “Blessed are those who mourn,” for it is through mourning and stillness that prayer will become luminous, and through prayer we will receive the comfort for mourners. «This is something» that cannot be accomplished by mourning unless a person is living by himself. Even in the world this is the rule for a mourner, that he should not concern himself with anything apart from mourning during the period of lamentation, separate from cares about other things. The state of mourning is a single solitary suffering, which takes control in the heart alone, and it is not possible that such a person will accept moderation in his mourning, unless inside himself he finds comfort concerning the subject of his mourning.

Also, without outward mourning there is hidden weeping that is infused in the mind, which carries in the heart a continual suffering

³¹Mt 5.4, 9.

³²Cf. Mt 26.41.

³³Mt 6.6.

³⁴Mt 25.35–36.

concerning a person's sins; or there is spread over his heart a sorrow at the recollection of the humiliation of our Lord; or it is suffering because of sinners in general; or maybe, it is sorrowful anguish over heavenly matters, with his constant expectation, not being comforted by anything from this world, unless that person finds his desire concerning which he is suffering.

This is the continual mourner, and even without visible bodily tears such a person weeps continually in his hiddenness. Whoever has acquired within himself one out of these *beatitudes*—namely, “Blessed are the mourners, for they shall be comforted,” even if your consolation is delayed, O discerning mourner, do not be grieved: before you pass from this world, your blessedness will shine out for you and then release you from the body.

4.75 The initial principles of the mode of life of solitaries *consist in* self-emptying, stillness, and not being bound up with anyone or anything. The practice *involved in* it is endurance of *external* circumstances, humility, and prayer. The fruits from these consist in an entry into hope and the delight of joy in God. A good outcome of these is receiving the keys to the glorious mysteries of the Spirit. The end of the road is the taste of love and the humble freedom of speech towards him who is loved.

Any beginners who do not realize what is involved in the road—that is, the stripping away of self and stillness—it is clear that they do not have humility or prayer, and being useless in these respects they will of necessity be troubled by sins. And the person who is a sinner, not only does he have no place in the kingdom, but he has gained an assured place in Gehenna.

4.76 Do you want to recognize a “man of God”? Learn who he is from the continual silence, from his weeping, and from his continual *care* for his soul.

4.77 Do you want to recognize a man whose heart is undermined? *You will do so* from his talking a great deal, and from the turmoil

of his senses, also from the fact that on whatever topic he speaks, he strives to win the argument.

Someone who has in fact tasted truth will not argue over truth. Someone who is considered among people as zealous on behalf of the truth has not yet even learned what truth is really like, since once he has truly learned about it, he will also desist from zeal on its behalf.

The gift of God and the knowledge of him is not a cause for commotion or shouting out: rather, the place where the Spirit, love, and humbleness reside is entirely filled with peace, and this is the sign of the coming of the Spirit, for by these the person on whom the Spirit has tabernacled is made perfect.

God is truth. The mind that has become aware of God does not possess a tongue to speak, and it resides in great rest in the heart: there is no stirring of zeal or argument, no impulse of anger, no being upset on behalf of the faith, no desire for any object, no self-will desirous to act; rather, the soul resides in great and ineffable peace, in great stillness. For it is out of ignorance that a person is stirred into action because of the ignorance of others and for their correction.³⁵

4.78 If zeal were useful for the correction of fellow human beings, why did God the Word put on the body in order to turn the world towards his Father by means of kindness and in humble ways; why was he stretched out on the cross on behalf of sinners, handing over to suffering that holy body on behalf of the world? What I say is that God did this for no other reason apart from making known to the world the love he has, his purpose being so that through our greater love as a result of being aware of this, we might be captivated by his love. For the great power of the kingdom of heaven—which

³⁵As D. F. Bumazhnov has pointed out, Isaac here reflects the opening of Letter 7 in the corpus attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite; see his "Erkenntnis der Wahrheit als absolutes Ende religiöser Polemik. Irenische Theologie des Dionysios Areopagita bei Isaak von Ninive," in *Syrische Studien. Beiträge zum 8. Syrologie-Symposium in Salzburg 2014*, ed. D. W. Winkler, *Orientalia-Patristica-Oecumenica* 10 (Vienna: Lit, 2016), 33–40.

«consists» in love—will, through the death of his Son, provide the reason «for the incarnation». It was not at all the case that it was to deliver us from sins, nor was the death of our Lord for any other reason, apart alone for letting the world perceive the love that God has towards created beings.

If this entire amazing matter had only been for the forgiveness of sins, it would have sufficed to save the «world» by another means. Who would have objected if he had effected what he did effect by an ordinary death? But he did not effect his death at all in an ordinary way, in order that you might understand «the magnitude» of this mystery; instead, he tasted it through the cruel suffering of the cross. What need was there for the insults and spitting—«mere» death would have been enough: his death on its own without these other things would have sufficed for our salvation.

What wisdom filled with Life on God's part! Now you understand and perceive why the coming of our Lord took place, and all that followed on from it, up to «the time» when his holy mouth clearly related the reason: "For thus God loved the world, so as to give his Only-begotten Son"³⁶—that is, for the «purposes of the divine» dispensation on behalf of the «world's» renewal.

Are we not perhaps hesitant in taking this understanding concerning the mysteries of the dispensation of our Lord, because we diminish the death of Christ and his coming into the world to such an extent, by positing «it» as the cause of our salvation from sin? Was the power of sin so much stronger than God's power? Wanting to get rid of «sin», was he not able to get rid of it except by the death of Christ? Is that the mystery of the dispensation of Christ, to save us from servitude to sin? In that case, if we had not sinned, the coming of Christ would not have taken place; nor would Christ have died, in that it would not have been the possibility for God the Word to put on our body, which he did «supposedly» because of the sins of the world! «That is,» if we only look at the outer sense of Scripture. And

³⁶In 3.16. There is a marginal gloss on the possible theopaschite implications of the paragraph.

if death had not had authority over us because of the tyranny of sin, as it appears, this mystery of his revelation in the flesh would have remained behind, and both human beings and angels would have been deprived of such great illumination and knowledge.

Should we then be grateful to sin, seeing that it was because of it that we have received all these benefits and all these wonderful things? Should we allocate to «sin» the reason, seeing that the holy angels too have received a great good now at the hands of sin, for it has held them worthy of the mystery of the coming of Christ? Had sin not been committed we could then say that neither for them nor for us is there the hope of the world to come for us to delight in, as is now «the case». Why then is sin reprimanded, seeing that it has brought all these benefits? If this is the case, the death of our Lord, his suffering and the entire mystery of his coming and the time «he spent» on earth would have been entirely in order to deliver us from sin and save us from Gehenna, he being the Judge, and he the one who suffered and repaid the debt, and if no other mysteries had been hidden «in his death» that could be compared with sin, so that it needed such concern in order «for it» to abase the Son of God to all these insults.

Should we «really» ascribe sin as the cause of all these amazing things, so that if we had not been enslaved to «sin's» servitude, we would have remained without them all? And if we had remained in righteousness, we would not have been worthy of «his coming». Is it «really» sin that has given us this?

As it is, this is not the case. Far be it from us, as mere infants, to inquire into the dispensation of the Lord and such a vast mystery, or to ask about it, remaining on the outer surface of Scripture. Even if it is not permitted for everyone to open the door, and to remove the intervening boundary laid down for «human» nature, nevertheless with the tongue's silence—which constitutes the hidden and mysterious space—it is permitted for those who share in the mysteries to investigate with awe and to wonder at the economy of God, and the riches hidden concealed inside the outer form of the words of

Scripture: those who, through grace share in the mystery, are permitted to examine *the matter* with trepidation and to be amazed by God's dispensation and the riches hidden concealed within the outer surface of the words of Scripture. Those who have received understanding and the gift of insights, possess a knowledge of his all-wondrous dispensation, not only in matters revealed and known, *for* they have entered within the mysteries that have been marked down in ink in a corporeal fashion.

To the Trinity, revered mystery, the hiddenness of whose separate co-essential Persons has shone out for us in the mystery of the love that has been revealed in our *human* flesh, to the delight of all, may there be praise, worship, and thanksgiving, for the First-fruits of our race, now and always and to eternal ages. Amen.

4.79 The single cause of the coming into being of the world and of the advent of Christ to the world *is* an indication of the magnitude of the love of God, which stirred the two things into being.

4.80 The mirror of the powerfulness of the love of God with respect to creation is the coming of Christ to the world; the mirror of his love is his various abasements.

4.81 Just as God has indicated the exalted love with which he brought the worlds into being by the dispensation of Christ, repeating it with us, thus by the repetition of this *love* in Christ, he has manifested that, in the world to come, he will manifest clearly its true interpretation to rational beings.

4.82 In the world to come, the acuteness of love for the Creator and the inebriation *with it* will effect in everyone a precise contemplation of the passion and humiliation of Christ.

4.83 Just as this world was not capable of receiving the magnitude of the glory that is to come, so the feebleness of this *human* nature in which we are clothed is not capable of receiving the mystery of

the things that have been prepared by God to be brought about with respect to creation in the New World.

4.84 The mystery that is hidden in the dispensation of our Lord, is more exalted than the forgiveness of sins and the dissolution of death, O my beloved. Wondrous and exalted is the hope that is hidden from us for the moment, my brothers, beyond anything that we are instructed³⁷ in now for the assistance of our growth. It is still necessary that we should be instructed in feeble ways for the remainder of time, since the whole world does not *yet* exist with a perfect intention of faith and the good way of life *expected* of children of God: in most cases people still need to be educated by lowly means, using fear.

4.85 Just as the names and parables, as well as the terms concerning God, denoting the passions of anger and judgement, as well as the anthropomorphic designations, etc., that are set down by the dispensation within creation, are *all seen to be*, inadequate and far feebler than the actual situation, when a person is raised to a true contemplation by the power of the activity of the Spirit, so too these weak terms that Scripture sets down concerning the cause of the coming of Christ are far inferior and more lowly than the true reason for his dispensation towards the world; and the spiritual natures³⁸ who do not know sins, nor do they ever perform them in their ranks, testify to what levels they have been raised by the revelation of Christ.

4.86 Much greater is the dispensation that is effected with respect to those supernal worlds and the mysteries that have been revealed among them, than those that have taken place with us, even if the cause of this originated with us, just as also in their nature and their abode they are more exalted, of a more refined nature, and closer to God than we are: they are placed as secondary beings,³⁹ after God, and light after Light, chamberlains of the King, fiery ranks appointed

³⁷Or: "trained"; see also Textual Note.

³⁸I.e., angels.

³⁹Isaac is using the terminology of Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 40.5, 45.5, etc.

to stand in front of the palace, being capable of seeing to his wishes, and who are not hindered by the flesh from a precise gaze at the mysteries of his sanctuary; distanced from being subject to the passions, and resembling God in so far as a created being is mentally aware. They are also the first ministers of the mysteries of Christ and the mediators for the inner sanctifications of his dispensation, escorting his fiery throne with their holy movements as they cry "holy," far above the corporeal world, providing a natural garment of praise and an invisible light that is typified in the primordial light.

4.87 All the things that the superior creation of the angels has received, whether in nature or in honor beyond their present nature, are more than what is found in our creation. In the world to come all the things that belong to them, he will give to us in full, without any diminution, or lacking in anything that they have received, making the second part of creation not inferior to the first part—that is, those who are spiritual beings now. Rather, that spiritual state and immortality, the state of not eating and of not being subject to the passions, with the interiority of the mysteries, the lofty place of abode, along with everything else, which now, in accordance with what has pleased him, he has given them in the first place, but finally he will perfect us in all that belongs to them, without doing injustice to one part of creation with respect to the other. Far be it! His love towards us and towards the holy angels is a single love, and his love that is towards sinners is just like that that is towards the righteous: the taking from us by our Lord at the incarnation is testimony to this. There is a great necessity for the things that are deficient with us, in that by their means all the dispensations of God are carried out, being beneficial to us and to the angels, for he is going to establish us in the beyond above those things.

But now it is necessary that the will of each one of us be revealed in comparison with our actions—be revealed, not by him, but by us, in order that the multitude of his mercies that he is going to reveal, may be all the more sweet for us when compared with our

unworthiness; as Scripture has said; “the person to whom little is forgiven, loves little.”⁴⁰ For strong is the love of the person who is forgiven much, seeing that, if he had not first been handed over in condemnation because of the multitude of his sins, he would think that he would receive at the end what was appropriate, in that not even a single righteous person will be found who, after entering the judgment, is not standing guilty.

4.88 For this reason also the sick state of creation at present, and the fact that he has for now made us less than the angels,⁴¹ and our situation and training that is in this world first of all, and the inclination *«to sin»* to which *«our sick state»* is subject, *«all this»* he has made as the reason for all these acts of *«his»* dispensation towards us, involving both fearful and glorious matters from creation onwards, *«his purpose being»* the revelation of the multitude of his mercies and his mighty power. All these things are known to those with understanding.

To the many people who demand of the Maker, “Why did he not from the very beginning make us thus, like them⁴² and place us in the future glory?”—these are people who do not know what they are talking about, nor *«are they aware of»* all the weighty reasons why *«this»* feeble state is in place, how it is from these things here *«on earth»* it was necessary that the delight of the kingdom of heaven might be *«all the more»* strengthened.

Gloss [in the margin]: If someone should say that for children, etc., who are not aware of these things, what is the benefit from them? We have assurance on this matter, that they will be made perfect along with everyone in common.

4.89 How would the patience of God have become known to us, if the sickness of *«human»* nature and the weak characteristics had not come into being? Whence would we have known the mighty power

⁴⁰Cf. Lk 7.47.

⁴¹Cf. Ps 8.5.

⁴²I.e., angels.

of the Creator if there had not been the change in *human* nature; or if the great force *present* in the elements, had not been stirred up against the disobedient by way of chastisements? And how would a rationale for the coming of the Lord have been provided, with the many things that he manifested during the incarnation demonstrating the magnitude and the revelation of his love? And how would it have been possible for us to enjoy *that* love in the kingdom of heaven, when he who gave it to us was not visible, if a visible image had not been taken from us, by which we might see him clearly? And all these things that are to come would have been fantasies, but for the feeble state of this world. For not even the invisible natures *of the angels* would have been aware that their creation in that glory exists at the will of the Creator, had not the feeble state of the inclination *towards sin* driven some of them out from beneath that *divine* care that upholds everything: because of *this proclivity*, negligence occurred and the providence that upheld them was cut off from them, and they appeared like heavy stones having slipped down into the depth. For this reason, the all-wise God, the Lord of all, ordered this world with *its* weaknesses in a good way. He was pleased to make it just as it proceeds now, and it was not with any other purpose in mind, either the absence of sinfulness, or of the proclivity *to sin*, or of resistance to adversity and weaknesses, changed into something else against his will *for it*, with him wanting this world to proceed in a different way—even though Scripture introduces and posits other reasons, sometimes Satan, sometimes our disobedience to the first commandment, sometimes various other things, while the true cause of everything is hidden with him and is quite different. *Examples of other reasons in Scripture are:* If Adam had not sinned, then death would not have entered for *human* nature, whereas it is clear, and *Adam's* constitution itself testifies that he was created for this end, even before he had sinned.⁴³ Again, “The Lord repented

⁴³Isaac follows Theodore of Mopsuestia here, whereas Ephrem held that Adam and Eve were created in an intermediary state, and death was the consequence of their failure to keep God's commandment.

of having made Adam on the earth and was sorry at heart,”⁴⁴ as if the matter had only recently occurred to him, and he had not seen it before creating Adam, whereas “the entire construction of the world was marked out in the mind of the Creator.”⁴⁵ Or like “The groan of Sodom has gone up to me, I will go down to see if it is thus,”⁴⁶ as though he needed to learn, along with other cases where, while the purpose of God’s dispensation was looking towards something else, Scripture was introducing in their place other reasons for the benefit of learners, in view of the insufficiency of those who were still needing training; subsequently, however, in a later generation, which was more perfect than those before it, he gave to those who share in the mysteries of the divine reality truth to understand the intention of Scripture and the ordering and reason for the actions of God’s dispensation, which were performed towards those of old; such was the case of the blessed Paul and the rest of his disciples after him, who through the Spirit received insights and an interpretation. You should understand me in this way also concerning the mystery of the mode of life of this world, how a particular understanding is hidden in it. God partially reveals to some people an understanding of certain aspects of the mystery, depending on the time, the development of the world, and individuals. These are things hidden from people in general.

4.90 My brothers, if sometimes we have given in other Headings material for meditation in a different way concerning these and similar matters, this has been with a separate aim, and you should not see us as contradicting ourselves: rather, because we were travelling above on the manifest road of the Scriptures we set out matters, according to the measure and place without taking our discourse into the hiddenness of the Scriptures. Thus both the one and the other interpretation are true: the latter is spiritual knowledge, while the former is the common knowledge of the manifested path that the

⁴⁴Gen 6.6.

⁴⁵Sir 23.20.

⁴⁶Gen 18.20–21.

Scriptures have given us. As long as a person is not at the *right* stage, *his* hearing will not take in the words. But when God wishes to grant *it* and it is beneficial for someone, and the *right* time for him having come, along with the hearing *of the Scriptures*, he receives the gift. Then, from that word he penetrates further into another *sense*, that is greater than the first—and other *senses*, and yet others are revealed to him, things that it is not permitted to entrust to writing. And along with these, there is the testimony of the heart.

4.91 The partial conviction of the mind *comes through* the assistance found in prayer by someone when he makes request with diligence concerning something, and he finds it in actual experience as a result of the prayer's request. From this point a person acquires confidence in prayer: he is confirmed in his faith and acquires much conviction in his soul, in the hope that concerns God.

Elucidation: Divine compassion furnishes the stirring of his eternal will, which is going to come from him with respect to the outcome, corresponding to someone's prayers concerning his mercies towards us, while not extending the boundary of his essential thought for some holy person in an ordinary way, but stirring in that person the movements of prayers concerning the things he is going to effect, so that from here *that person* may be associated with God in his mind's hope, and so take care for the converse of prayer, which consists in one's thought being continually on God.

4.92 The first gift that is granted to the solitary in the deep and watchful stillness *comes* when he has completed the second stage, which is the middle measure of the practice of the solitary life, and once he has taken the first steps on entering the third stage, which is the spiritual mode of life, when the grace of the Holy Spirit tabernacles over him: first of all, concentration of mind is granted him, and from here he enters into those vast gifts that are written down concerning the fathers.

4.93 In that second stage, which consists in labor on the level of the soul, even if this concentration of mind occurs, it is only at the time of the office and prayer that a little assistance is granted by God, corresponding to the guarding of their stillness and remaining cut off from other people. This takes place gently⁴⁷ and not in a complete manner, as Blessed John from Apamea testifies: “The concentration of the mind only occurs for a short time,” and this when it is not completely purified from distraction.⁴⁸

When someone has just about reached the completion of this mode of life on the level of the soul, little by little he receives progress, as the gift becomes stronger, because he has begun to see the haven from afar. Now once he approaches the meeting point with the following mode of life, then the *divine* Power fully tabernacles over him, and from this point, not only at the time of the office and prayer, but also at other hours, he becomes as it were inebriated with God all the time, with his mind concentrated of its own accord on the ineffable mystery.

It may be that while occupied with some meditation, or while reading Scripture, his thought is suddenly contracted and stops still for a great while. This is a feature of those who are advanced, where the spacing out of time corresponds to a person’s measure. Sometimes this lasts a day and a night, sometimes more and sometimes less.

Elucidation: The labor of the level of the soul is the mode of life of repentance, which constitutes the middle measure of the mode of life of solitude—that is, the stage of penitents. The understanding of the level of the soul is *still*, a distorted mind-set, which is not receptive of spiritual matters, in that it proceeds with the mindset of a person’s self.

4.94 No one should be astonished if they do not find this concentration of mind easily—including that partial *kind* at the time of the office and prayer—for it does not come only from the labors of

⁴⁷See Textual Notes.

⁴⁸Cf. John the Solitary, *On the Soul* (ed. Dederig, p. 14; trans. Hansbury, p. 32).

the body; nor, in the «case» of the small number «who acquire it» is it found easily and in a short time. Rather, it is granted «only» in great stillness, and with the toil of the heart, and with people who have fully abandoned the world, and are completely dead to seeing and hearing «fellow» human beings. If someone prepares himself in this way, and out of yearning for God, he feels disdain for the body and the world, first of all he is held worthy of as it were a taste of the partial «experience», and afterwards this grows in him like a seedling, and by God's grace he attains to that incomparable gift.

Let this gift entice you on, my beloved, and let us cut off the world and cast it away from us, and let us hasten on our course of «following» after Christ.

4.95 But someone is going to ask: “In what «state» is the mind at these times and during that exalted collectedness?” As Scripture has said: “Stillness fell upon Abraham,”⁴⁹ and as it said concerning Adam: “And the Lord God cast stillness «*shelya*» upon Adam.”⁵⁰ The Greek, however, instead of “stillness” says “wonder” «*temha*». And when the blessed Interpreter interprets the mystery of wonder, he calls wonder “that which is outside the normal order «of things»,” when someone is outside any human awareness.⁵¹ But the solitary fathers call this “the concentration of the intellect that comes from grace,” and “the pledge of the delight of the New World.”⁵²

4.96 Until you become aware—with our Lord's assistance—just to a small extent of the stirrings of humility, you will not be aware of the taste and the assistance that comes from your labors, nor will your mind be recollected from distraction, nor will you meet the chance

⁴⁹Gen 15.12: Peshitta *shelya*, Greek *ekstasis*.

⁵⁰Gen 2.21: Peshitta *shelya*, Greek *ekstasis*, for which Isaac has *temha*. For this and similar passages elsewhere in Isaac, see André Louf, “*Temha-stupore e tahra meraviglia negli scritti di Isacco il Siro*,” in *La grande stagione della mistica siriana (VI–VIII secolo)*, ed. Emidio Vergani, Sabino Chialà, et al. (Milan: Centro Ambrosiano, 2009), 93–119.

⁵¹Theodore of Mopsuestia, perhaps from a lost part of his commentary on Genesis.

⁵²Unidentified; “New World” is a characteristic term in John of Apamea, but the phrase appears not to come from any of his published works.

events that encounter you in a firm and persevering manner, without becoming perturbed and confused.

When, through God's mercy for you, thoughts of humility begin to be stirred in you in a stable way, before everything else listlessness will be lifted from you, and you will be granted continuous thanksgiving: whether you are hungry or are satisfied, whether you are thirsty or in need or sick or vexed by someone—you will be continually giving thanks, your tongue not staying still for a moment out of gratitude. And you will continually find yourself under the obligation of owing a debt all the time to all humanity in everything, and no one is seen by you as doing wrong to you, but in all misfortunes you will find that the cause goes back to you in all the vexations that come upon you.

4.97 Listen to the truth of the words: whenever you do not find, you are going to be tested more than by anything else by listlessness. Listlessness gives birth in you to continual reproaches and you see the majority of people as doing you some wrong. But when you gaze at the matter well and fittingly, it is you who are not in a good state. For this reason, everything seems to you the wrong way round.

4.98 A person will see various excellent things in himself at the time when he is advanced so as to come close already to the constitution that exists within himself.

4.99 Let every mouth praise you, O Jesus, the very ground of our pride;⁵³ let the hidden first-fruits of our thoughts be sacrificed to you at every moment; let humanity's flesh and bones render you luminous praise; may we joyfully offer up to you thanksgiving in the suffering of love. For it is in you that we have learned of the purpose that was hidden in your Father from eternity; in you we have received bounty when our expectation was the opposite; in you knowledge of salvation has shone out while our course was still lying within the bounds of wild animals. As the First-Fruit⁵⁴ you were taken on

⁵³Cf. 2 Cor 8.24.

⁵⁴Cf. 1 Cor 15.20, 23.

behalf of our entire *human* race and offered up to the Divinity. For you offer up our requests to him who has no need of requests, for in you our prayers are raised up before God, and into our prayers you mix your prayers that are for us. You are the righteousness of everyone, for on behalf of all, from all, out of compassion, you were taken, and on behalf of the sins of all you are sufficient for reconciliation with the Divinity.

It was not as a first-fruit that is offered up from possessions that you were offered up from us to the Divinity, nor did our nature then have this discernment.⁵⁵ From himself he who is kind devised it, and of his own accord he took you from us, when we had not thought of it, nor had it entered our mind, so that some righteous man should not boast that this had happened because of him! That there has been no upright person, not even one,⁵⁶ the Apostle has put the seal on the words of the prophet. Our evil was not too difficult for you, for it was not recently that you came to know of it: before the establishment of our *human* nature you were aware of the suffering of our nature, for sin had made its imprint on the *entire* extent of our nature. *All* this good did you devise concerning us!

4.100 Who can praise you as is your due, O God, Father of all, who give what is good without *our* asking; let not the hope of you fade from our hearts, for it is *only* by means of this that the remembrance of you will be continually fixed in our minds. And the One whom, for the sake of the hope of the whole world, you raised up *coming* from all to you, may he be the One who fulfills this thanksgiving. And, O Lord, let none of those who are clothed in his flesh and blood remain behind from him on earth, but let them be drawn up to their portion in heaven, and there let the *entire* extent of the world praise you, rejoicing in its First-fruits in that new *song of glory*, which does not proceed from the tongue of flesh. Amen.

End of the Four Discourses of the Headings on *Spiritual Knowledge*.

⁵⁵I.e., to initiate this.

⁵⁶Rom 3.10; Ps 13.3.

Concordance to the Different Chapter Numberings for the “First Part”

Over the course of time the text of the “First Part” has been divided up in different ways: the chapter numbering in the early Greek manuscript tradition (followed by Marcel Pirard in his excellent new edition of the Greek text) already differed from that of the Syriac, while the first printed edition (1770), by Nikephoros Theotokis, introduced a completely different ordering, which likewise features in the reprinting of Theotokis’ text edited by Ioakim Spetsieris (1895, and several subsequent reprints). Wensinck’s English translation of the Syriac naturally keeps to the chapter numbering of Paul Bedjan’s edition of the Syriac text. Modern translations made on the basis of the Greek text, such as the French translation by J. Touraille, reproduce the chapter numbering found in Spetsieris’ edition, while the excellent English translation published by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery (Brookline) has for the most part gone back to the chapter sequence in the oldest Greek manuscripts. Not all the Syriac chapters were translated into Greek in the ninth century,¹ but at the same time the Greek translation included five chapters or discourses that are not in fact by Isaac, but belong to two quite different Syriac authors, Philoxenus of Mabbug (d. 523), and John the Elder (John of Dalyatha), who lived in the eighth century.

¹This is to a large extent remedied in the Appendix to the English translation published by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery (especially in the second edition: Appendix A, 540–74; concordance in Appendix D, pp. 575–77).

(a) Concordance to the Syriac, Greek (both editions), and the English translation published by the Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Brookline.

Syriac (ed. Bedjan; tr. Wensink)	Greek (ed. Pirard)	Greek (ed. Theotokis/ Spetsieris)	English (tr. Holy Transfiguration Monastery)
1	1	1	1
2	2	30	2
3	3	82-83, 44-45	3
4	4	23	4
5	5	5	5
6	6	56	6
7	14	22	7
8	7	21	8
9	8	41	9
10	9	70	10
11	10	11	11
12	13	11	12
13	11	14	13
14	12	15	14
15	15	9	18
16	16	13	19
17	17	29	20
18	18	75-79	21
19	-	-	Appendix A (ed. 2)
20	-	-	22
21	-	-	22
22	19	31-32	23
23	-	-	24
24	-	-	25
25	21	67	26
26	-	-	27
27	22	84	28
28	23	74	29
29	-	-	30
30	20	42, 55	32

31	-	-	33
32	24	68	34
33	25	24	35
34	26	16	36
35	27	85, 47	37-38
36	28	51-54	39
37	29	26	40
38	30	26-27	41
39	31	46	42
40	32	17	43
41	33	Letter 1	44
42	34	Letter 2	45
43	35	72	46
44	36	18	47
45	37	73	48
46	38	73	48
47	39	39-40	49
48	40	57	50
49	-	-	Appendix A
50	41	58, 60	51
51	42	62-65	52
52	43	66	53
53	44	33, 3	54
54	-	-	Appendix A (ed.2)
55	45	61	55
56	-	-	Appendix A
57	47	25	56
58	48	37	57
59	49	4	59
60	50	36	60
61	51	48	61
62	52	38	62
63	53	35	63
64	46	59	58
65	54	34	64
66	55	Letter 3	65
67	56	69	66

68	57	69	66
69	58	12	67
70	59	8	68
71	-	-	Appendix A
72	60	49	69
73	61	50	70
74	62	81	71
75	-	-	Appendix A
76	-	-	Appendix A
77	63	19	72
78	64	6	73
79	65	71	74
80	66	28	75
81	67	86, Letter 4	76
82	68	20	77

(b) Texts not by Isaac in the Greek translation:

These five texts are edited in the Appendix of M. Pirard, *Logoi Asketikoi*, pp. 800–861.

Pirard	Syriac	Spetsieris	tr. Holy Transfiguration Monastery
1	John of Dalyata, <i>Hom.</i> 1	43	15
2	—, <i>Hom.</i> 20	2	16
3	—, <i>Hom.</i> 22 (4) ²	80	31
4 ³	—, <i>Letter</i> 18	7	17
5	Philoxenos, <i>Letter to Patricius</i>	Letter 4	Appendix B, part II (only in ed. 1)

²The numbering of the Homilies varies in the manuscripts; see the Table in N. Khayyat, *Jean de Dalyatha, Les homélies, I–XV* (Antelias, 2007), 26–28. Letter 18 is also duplicated by John's Homily 10.

³Also attributed to Abba Isaiah.

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a. *The "First Part"*

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(ii) Greek:

Nikephoros Theotokis prepared the *editio princeps* (Leipzig, 1770), based on late manuscripts, and with the sequence of chapters rearranged; this edition forms the basis for that edited by I. Spetsieris (1895, with several reprints). These old editions are now replaced by the excellent critical edition, based on the oldest manuscripts: *Abba Isaak tou Syrou: Logoi Asketikoi*. Edited by Marcel Pirard. Mt Athos: Iveron Monastery, 2010.

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(i) from Syriac:

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(ii) from Greek:

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The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian. [Translated by D. Miller.] Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1984; 2nd ed. 2011.

¹Largely limited to English, French, German, and Italian titles. For a much fuller bibliography, see Grigory Kessel and Karl Pinggéra, *A Bibliography of Syriac Ascetic and Mystical Literature*, Eastern Christian Studies 11 (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 103–22, with “An Update (2011–2017),” *Hugoye: Journal Of Syriac Studies* 21 (2018): 454–72.

Nota bene: In both these translations, the numbering of the *Discourses* differs from that of the Syriac, which is followed by Wensinck.

(iii) Partial Translations:

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Gen 1.27	K2.67	64.4	K2.19, 59
2.21	K4.95	65.1	K1.50
3.11	K2.84	Jer 1.5	K4.36
6.6	K4.89	Lam 5.19-21	K4.36
12.1	K1.85	Ez 37. 5-6, 9	1.85
15.12	K4.95	Dan 3.19, 29	K4.36
18.20-21	K4.89	3.33	K4.36
26.24	K1.17	12.7	K3.16
Ex 3.14	K4.3	Sirach 23.20	K4.89
6.3	K4.3	Mt 3.11	K3.74
12.43, 48	K1.27	5.4	K1.78, 80; K4.74
Num 12.8	K1.17	5.8	1.52
13.23, 26	K3.64	5.9	K4.74
Deut 6.12, 8.11	K1.23	6.6	K4.74
1 Sam (1 Kg LXX) 1.27	K1.81	6.10	K1.59, 89
2 Kg (4 Kg LXX) 6.17	K2.50	6.12	1.65
Prov 19.10	K1.27	9.12	K4.36
Job 38.7	K1.8	13.8	K3.48
Eccl 8.8	K4.57	13.43	K2.83
Ps 6.51.85		16.17	K1.89
14.3	K4.99	18.20	K2.88
18.9	K1.51	19.27	K2.81
36.6	K1.51	25.35-36	K4.74
36.9	K1.91	26.36	K3.73
48.2	K2.67	26.41	K4.74
93.5	K3.23-24	Lk 7.47	K4.87
103.21	K3.57	10.18	K3.87
110.3	K3.24	10.42	K1.58
115.16(LXX 113.26)	1.85	23.42-43	K2.46
126.2	K2.63	Jn 2.19	K1.88
139.12	K1.70	3.16	K4.78
140.5	K2.29	4.20	1.65
142.9	1.85	11.11	1.87
Is 14.12	K3.87	14.2	K1.89

16.9	K1.4	Gal 6.14	K1.26
16.21	1.10	Eph 1.21	K3.88
17.11, 21-3	K1.91	4.13	K3.71
Acts 20.31	K1.82	4.22	K2.79, 85, 88
Rom 3.10	K4.99	5.2	1.37
5.8, 10	K1.50	6.12	K3.88
8.26	K3.72	Phil 3.21	K3.74; K4.55
1 Cor 2.9	K2.19, 59	Col 1.15	K2.19, K2.65
7.31	K3.9	2.2	K1.25, 38
9.22	K3.18	2.15	K1.90; K3.88
10.2	K1.36	3.9	K2.79, 85, 88
13.12	K1.91	1 Thess 1.5	K1.38
14.19	K1.55	4.17	K1.92
15.20, 23	K2.19; K4.99	2 Tim 2.3	1.17
15.28	K3.1(note)	3.17	1.17
15.50	K1.89	4.7-8	K4.7
16.9	K3.38	Heb 5.6	K1.21
2 Cor 4.10	K2.55	9.11, 24	K1.22
5.4	K3.80	10.10	1.37
5.14	1.37	10.20	K1.86
7.10	K2.99	12.22	K2.67
8.24	K4.99	Jas 5.20	1.64
12.2	K2.59	1 Pet 3.18	1.70
12.8	K1.59; K2.60	2 Pet 1.4	1.75

(2) Patristic Authors Cited

<i>Apophthegmata</i> , Anonymous series,	4.82	K2.45
310-12 K2.50	5.6	K3.90
Alphabetic series, Moses 6 1.41	5.16	K1.52
Dionysius (Ps.) the Areopagite K4.4,	5.46	K1.22
48, 77	5.57	K3.48
Evagrius,	5.63	K3.57
<i>Kephalaia Gnostika</i> 1.26 K1.10	<i>Kephalaia</i> , Supplement 50	K1.37
1.27 K2.102	<i>Praktikos</i> 59	K1.18
1.46 K2.36; K3.14	73	K1.17
2.2-3 K2.105; K3.9	76	K3.92
2.4 K1.5	80	K1.23
2.33 K2.75	<i>Gnostikos</i> 4.45	K2.77
2.34 K1.92	<i>Thoughts</i> 8	K3.90
2.63 K1.56	19	K3.87
3.6 K1.37	<i>Letter to Melania</i> 5	K3.1
4.6 K2.77	Hippocrates, <i>Aphorisms</i> , 1	K3.62
4.36 K3.64	Jacob "the Mutilated,"	
4.51 K3.57	Martyrdom (AMS 2.555)	K2.63

- John of Apamea, *On the Soul* K3.47;
 K4.46, 93
 Letters K4.25
 Unidentified 1.55; K1.36, 55
 Mark the Monk, *Spiritual Law* K2.39
 Concerning Those Who Imagine That
 They Are Justified by Works K2.39,
 K4.25
 Markos, Abba (AMS 7.929–30) K4.25
 Narsai (ed. Mingana), 1.349 K4.58
 Palladius, *Lausiaca History* 27 K3.86
Paradise of the Fathers, AMS 7
 p. 165 K3.86
 p. 297 K3.86
 p. 498 K1.82
 p. 655 K4.58
 p. 686 1.29
 p. 715 K2.50
 p. 717 K2.50
 p. 773 K3.61(?)
 Theodore of Mopsuestia
 On Priesthood K3.94
 On the Firmament(?) K4.95
 Unidentified 1.61; K1.19; K3.70
 Unidentified sources 1.38; K1.5, 38, 82;
 K2.12, 76; K3.41, 61; K3.78; K4.11,
 14, 95

(3) Subject Index

- abandonment: 1.4; K2.21, 23, 81; K3.32;
 K4.39
 activity, action (divine): K1.20; K2.27,
 73, 90; K3.48 (of angels), 55; K4.85
 adversities, afflictions: 1.10; K2.20, 62;
 K4.39, 54–5, 57
 (see also vexations)
 alter(ation) (*šuhlāpa*): 1.56; K1.5–7, 92;
 K2.64; K3.57; see also change(s)
 angels: 1.23, 75; K1.2, 22, 43, 62, (68);
 K2.50, 52, 64, (66), 68–9, 72 (75),
 80; K3.(22), 47–49, 55–60, (72),
 77–78, (79), 80, (81), 91–92; K4.(4),
 12–3, 31, 78, (85), 87–88, (89)
 anger: K1.71, 73; K2.20, 38; K3.17, 78;
 K4.27, 55, 77, 85
 Archaï: K3.88
 Arsenius: K1.82
 assistance, help (divine): 1.28, 33, 39, 87,
 98; K2.1, 21, 47, 50; K3.13, 16, 18–19,
 37, 41, 57; K4.38, 43, 46, 61, 84, 91,
 93, 96
 Authorities: K3.88
 battle, struggle (*agona*): 1.10, 13–14,
 18, 46; K2.1, 21, 58, 98; K3.41, 64;
 K4.15, 39, 40–41, 56–57, 62
 beauty: K1.37, 86; K2.7, 72; K4.62–63
 body: 1.9, 13, 16, 20, 31, 33, 37, 50, 61, 75
 Cause (divine): K3.35
 cell 1.5, 41, 63, 65; K2.43–44, 97;
 K4.22–23, 25, (49), 71
 change(s) (*šuhlāpa*): 1.10, 17; K1.10, 19,
 27, 31, 92; K2.1, 9, 29, 47, 55, 64, 96;
 K3.57, 71; K4.2, 39, 44, 48, 55, 57,
 65, 71, 89
 Christological language: K1.22, 49, 91;
 K2.8, 19, 65–66; K3.72–73; K4.78;
 cf. also 1.37–38, 80–82, 85, 90;
 K1.17, 19, 21, 43–44, 86, 88, 90, 92;
 K2.30, 67–68; K3.79–82; K4.74,
 79–82, 84–87, 89, 99–100
 Church: 1.45
 cloud: 1.55, 75; K1.36, 51–52; K2.73, 102
 commandments: K1.21; K3.11, 99; K4.13,
 74
 community, monastic: K2.43–44, 95;
 K4.61, 71
 compassion: 1.65, 67, 74, 90; K2.29,
 38–39, 84; K3.70; K4.31, 44, 91, 99
 concentration, recollectedness
 (*kunnaša*): K2.34, 59, 63; K4.49,
 56, 72, 92–95
 confidence, trust: 1.23; K1.79; K2.44, 61,
 73; K4.91

- conscience (*tir̥ta*): 1.19, 49, 61; K2.48, 73, 82
- consolation: 1.4–5, 85; K1.80; K4.23, 31, 42, 57, 63, 73–74
- constancy: 1.5, 9–10, 22, 29; K4.34
- contemplation (*tėorya*): 1.32, 43; K1.5, 7, 18, 21, 24, 28–29, 32, 41–42, 44, 51, 56, 58, 62, 68, 72; K2.4–5, 7–8, 10, 72–73, 105; K3.9–10, 49, 56, 77, 90–92; K4.11, 44, 48, 82, 85
- contempt(ible): K1.5, 23; K2.44, 81
- converse (*enyana*): 1.1, 31, 35–36, 43, 95–96; 2.2, 6; K1.85; K2.44–45, 55; 79, 92, 97; K3.41; K4.15, 23, 32, 71, 91
- cross: K2.21, 58, 79; K3.11; K4.31, 78
- crown: 1.3, 7, 18; K1.53; K3.89, 100; K4.7–8
- darkness, spiritual: 1.14, 64, 85; K1.13, 30, 32, 34, 42; K2.11, 28, 45, 74, 78–79; K3.52; K4.22, 26–27, 39, 57
- David: K1.59
- death: 1.20, 33, 37, 69, 81, 92; K1.26, 80; K2.14, 37, 61, 100; K3.2, 7, 34, 61, 73–75; K4.84, 89.
- death of Christ: K1.50, 87; K2.55; K4.78
- delight, enjoyment (*bussama*): 1.20–21, 30–31, 35, 59, 71, 73, 85, 87, 92–93, 95; 2.1, 2, 6; K1.1, 9, 24, 59, 65, 78, 80–81, 87, 90–92; K2.11, 14, 17–8, 20, 29, 44, 47, 49, 60, 73, 77; K3.27, 34, 37, 57, 64, 77; K4.23, 25, 31–32, 47–48, 64–65, 69, 72, 75, 78, 88, 95
- demons: 1.13–14, 23, 37–8, 50, 57, 61; K2.11, 21, 45, 48, 50, 52–53, 61–62, 64, 80; K3.42, 60, 77, 86, 91; K4.24–26, 31, 35, 69
- desire: 1.11, 25, 31, 49, 61; K1.20, 40, 63, 70, 80, 86; K2.20, 39; K3.13, 29, 41, 44–45, 76–78, 88; K4.27, 31, 34, 66, 72, 74, 77
- despair: 1.4; K2.29, 44, 47, 64; K3.29
- despondency: 1.4; K1.80; K4.26
- discern(ment): 1.3, 23; K1.54; K2.55, 60, 73–75; K3.5, 53; K4.74, 99
- Dispensation (*mdabbranuta*): K1.51; K2.9; K3.6, 18, 56–57, 81–82; K4.47, 78, 81, 84–89
- distraction, wandering (*pehya*): 1.35, 49, 52, 71, 75–76, 78, 95; K1.28, 30, 42, 46, 63; K2.60; K4.27, 34–6, 44–9, 64, 93, 96
- good wandering: K1.84; K3.29
- divine, assistance: K2.21, 47; K3.18; K4.61; Being: 75; 2.2; K1.22; K2.19, 44; care: K1.1, 51; K2.15, 39, 47, 73, 100; K4.89; glory: 2.1, 6; grace: K2.11; love: K3.78; mind: K2.31; mysteries: K2.14; K4.13; nature: 1.75; 2.2; K1.22; K2.19, 44; power: K3.88; K4.46, 93; praises 2.2; stirrings 1.31; K2.82; vision: 1.49; K1.72; Will K2.24; working, agency K1.89; K2.14, 27; K4.25
- dreams: 1.1, 23
- ease: 1.34; K1.45, 69, 71; K2.11, 20, 38, 44, 79–80, 97; K3.31; K4.20, 24
- Elder: 1.5; K2.50, 81; K4.71
- Elisha: K2.50; K3.60
- Evagrius: 1.17; K1.10, 22; K3.14, 57, 90, 92, 20, 62, 95
- excellence (*myattruta*): 1.11, 60; K1.11, 27, 68; K2.8, 25; K3.54, 70; K4.4, 34, 64
(see also “virtue”)
- fast, fasting: 1.12, 28
- Fathers: 1.1, 3, 23, 41; K1.37, 59, 67, 82; K2.12, 21, 44, 50, 62, 76–7, 79; K3.41, 56, 61; K4.7, 11, 14, 25, 48–9, 57–58, 95
- fervor: 1.14; K2.69, 79; K3.14
- fire, flame (in prayer): 1.42, 94; K1.36, 39, 66; K2.13, 50, 60–61; K3.26, 48, 74
- First-fruits (title of Christ) K1; K2.19
- forgiveness: 1.60; K1.21; K4.38, 45, 78, 84

- fount, fountain: K1.91; K2.55, 79, 87;
K4.63, 68
- freedom, freewill: 1.20; 2.6; K1.12; K2.49,
57, 96; K3.2, 18, 36, 88–89; K4.15,
25, 54
- freedom of speech (*parrhēsia*): K2.10,
79, 101; K4.46, 73, 75
- Gehenna: 1.36, 40, 92; K3.93, 97; K4.75,
78
- gift, charism (*mauhabta*, *sukkana*): 1.49,
74; K1.21, 68, 72; K2.10–11, 17–8, 21,
38, 44, 47, 57, 79, 81, 101; K3.17, 38;
K4.11–12 14, 25, 31, 42, 44, 54, 56,
65, 69, 72, 77–78, 90, 92–94
- Gospel: K1.11, 22
- grace (*taybuta*): 1.1, 26, 75, 88, 91; 2.6;
K1.11, 27–28, 39, 62, 64, 68, 76, 86,
92, 98; K2.1, 8, 11, 17–18, 44–45, 60;
K3.18, 37, 44, 47, 57, 70–71; K4.25,
35, 46, 48, 57, 78, 94–95; grace of
the Holy Spirit: 2.6; K1.87; K2.55;
K4.92
- growth: 1.4; K1.1(title), 47, 57; K2.42, 47,
71–72, 75, 79, 85; K4.44, 84
- guarding: 1.41; K1.65; K2.57; K4.93
- haven, harbor: 1.82; K2.12, 79, 96; K4.31,
93
- heart: 1.12, 17, 20, 37, 39, 60–61, 67, 78,
82, 94–95; K1.11, 34–36, 55, 57, 61,
71, 77–80, 84–85, 87; K2.12–15, 17,
20–21, 24, 27–28, 30, 33, 38, 40,
44–45, 47, 52, 55, 57–61, 64, 77–79,
81, 91–94; K3.11, 13, 16–17, 29, 31,
37, 60, 63–64, 80, 97; K4.15–16, 23,
25, 29, 31, 33, 46, 48–49, 51–53, 63,
66–67, 74, 77, 89–90, 94, 100
- Holy Spirit: 1.3, 6; K1.91, 98; K2.14,
54–55; K3.55–56, 58, 60, 91–92;
K4.13, 92
- honey, honey-comb: K1.81; K4.31
- hope: 1.2, 4, 8, 19–21, 37–38, 41, 62, 71,
73, 80, 85, 88, 90, 93, 95; K1.19, 35,
38, 78–80, 84, 87; K2.9, 12, 15, 17,
19, 29–30, 84, 99; K3.28–29, 31–33,
35, 72–74, 80; K4.43–44, 75, 78,
84, 91, 100
- humility (*makkikuta*): 1.58–60, 78;
K1.25, 28, 36; K2.23, 34, 44, 64,
79; K3.16, 18, 20, 89; K4.31, 39, 75,
96–97
- humbleness (*mukkaka*): 1.58; K2.15, 21,
44, 91, 94; K4.30–31, 77
- illness, sickness: 1.46, 54; K1.13, 37;
K2.20, 39, 61, 80, 100; K3.34;
K4.25, 36, 72, 89
- illumination: 1.50; K3.13, 22, 58, 92;
K4.23, 68–69, 78
- Image: K2.19, 38; 3.74; image(s) 1.84, 95;
K1.34–36, 59–60, 67–68; K3.14;
K4.34–35, 89
- impassibility (*la hashoshutha*): K1.33;
K3.41 (see also under “passion”)
- imprint, impression (*tab’a*): K1.29,
95–98, 100; K2.2, 36; K3.14; K4.99
- inebriation: 1.52; K4.48, 82
- insight (*sukkala*): 1.31–2, 67, 95; K1(title),
4–5, 38, 41, 52, 55, 68; K2.13–15, 50,
59–60, 64, 76, 98; K3.18, 57, 91–92;
K4.13–14, 16–17, 44, 47, 63, 65, 68,
78, 89
- intellect (*hawna*): 1.13, 75–76; K1.4–5,
24, 28–29, 37, 42, 52, 54, 65, 67, 72,
78, 80, 100; K2.13–14, 34–36, 44,
48, 55–6, 60, 72–74, 77, 84; K3.38,
41, 77, 100; K4.4, 7–8, 10–11, 31, 48,
58, 60, 64, 66, 69, 95
- intention, purpose (divine): 1.1–2, 6;
2.4; K1.1–4, 19, 62, 67, 92; K2.3,
(?70–)73, 84, 101; K3.56; K4.89, 99
- human: K2.38; K3.60, 72, 98–99;
K4.33, 39, 68, 84
- Interpreter (Theodore of Mopsuestia):
1.61; K1.19–20; K3.70, 94; 4.78, 95
- Isaiah: K3.59
- Isho’zkhā: 1.1
- Israelites: K3.64

- Jacob: K3.59
 John: 1.55 (blessed); K4.93 (of Apamea)
 Joseph: K3.59
 Joshua: K3.59
 joy: 1.8, 22–24, 38, 40, 43, 59, 61, 75,
 82–83, 90, 92, 95; K1.1, 25, 35–6,
 78–80; K2.11–2, 14–15, 17, 29, 60,
 63–64, 77–78; K3.30–31, 37, 68,
 71, 77; K4.12, 19, 23, 25–26, 36, 44,
 48–49, 57, 63, 67, 75
 judgement: 1.90–92; K1.91; K2.44, 47, 73,
 102; K3.94; K4.35, 85, 87
 key: K4.75
 kneeling: 1.12, 39; K1.30, 63; K2.21, 44,
 81; K4.31, 47
 knowledge: 1.4, 17; K1.2, 4, 12–13, 15, 22,
 25–26, 28, 34, 41, 47, 56, 72, 96–98;
 K2.7, 11, 14, 16, 25–26, 28, 45, 47,
 49, 55, 59, 61, 64, 69, 71, 75, 77, 79,
 84–85; K3.6, 14, 18, 47–49, 51–54,
 56–58, 60, 63, 66, 70–72, 79, 81, 85,
 91, 99–100; K4.2–3, 12, 16–17, 21,
 31, 39–40, 48, 53, 68, 71–72, 77–78,
 90, 99
 labor(s) (*'amla*): 1.10–13, 20, 22, 34, 40,
 60–61, 76; K1.20, 28, 46, 69, 71–72,
 83; K2.11–12, 17, 27, 41–42, 44,
 50, 56, 64, 79–80, 92–93, 97, 103;
 K3.19, 51, 53, 86, 89, 97, 99; K4.1,
 12, 20, 31, 42–47, 50, 54–55, 57, 70,
 93–94, 96
 ladder: K4.31
 law(s): 1.61 (of Moses); K2.49, 81; K3.11,
 88; K4.25, 45, 65
 laxity, lassitude: 1.4; K1.18; K2.11, 98;
 K3.34; K4.23, 31, 39
 Lazarus: K1.87
 levels (spiritual): 1.5; K1.3, 5, 36, 59, 67;
 K2.8, 25, 59, 73, 75, 77; K3.14, 36,
 46–49, 56, 58, 86, 92; K4.10, 15, 31,
 60, 65–66, 69, 85, 93
 light: 1.12, 31; K1.13, 28–9, 37; K2.6–7,
 10–11, 32, 50, 74, 76, 78–79, 83;
 K3.4–5, 40, 58, 61, 83; K4.57–58,
 65, 67, 69, 86
 love: divine: 1.22, 37, 74, 81, 87, 93; 2.5;
 K1.20, 86, 88, 90; K2.8, 39, 47–48;
 K4.3, 78–81, 87, 89
 human: 1.1, 43, 51–52, 64, 69, 73, 75,
 94–95; K1.36, 57, 77–80; K2.24,
 39, 44, 59, 69, 73; K3.11–12, 22, 37,
 48 (of angels), 94; K4.27, 66, 72,
 76–78, 82, 99
 magnet: K1.92
 Mark the Solitary: K2.39
 Mediator: K1.91; K2.19.
 human: K4.63, 86
 medicine: 1.46, 48, 54; K1.30, K2.22, 99
 meditation (*herga*): 1.45, 52, 56, 96;
 K1.36, 52, 63, 77, 87, 99; K2.11,
 14, 28, 44–45, 60, 78, 84–85,
 87–89; K3.14, 37, 51, 73; K4.6, 12, 15,
 47–48, 90, 93
 Messalians: K4.31, 34
 mind (*mad'a*, *re' yana*, *tar' ita*): 1.12, 23,
 30, 32, 34, 51, 55–56, 60–1, 63, 67,
 78–79, 95–96; 2.3; K1.12–13, 20,
 23, 29, 31–34, 36–38, 41–42, 46,
 50, 52, 56, 58–61, 63–64, 66, 73,
 75, 77, 79–80, 86–9, 95, 100; K2.1,
 10–11, 14–15, 17, 20, 23, 26–29, 31,
 37–38, 44–46, 57, 59–61, 63–64,
 71–76, 78–79, 81, 87–90; K3.11, 14,
 26–28, 33, 42, 44–46, 49, 51–52,
 54, 56–58, 60, 60, 63, 77, 83, 86,
 91–92; K4.2, 4, 7, 12–16, 20, 23,
 26–28, 31, 33–36, 38, 41, 44, 46–49,
 53–54, 56–59, 61–69, 72, 74, 77, 89,
 91–96, 99–100
 mindful, mindfulness: 1.36, 55, 60;
 K1.86; K2.83
 mindset: K2.11, 37; K4.39
 mingling, intermingling: 1.25–26, 31, 43,
 95; K1.88, 91; K2.29, 33, 57, 77, 89;
 K4.26, 28, 38–39, 44, 66
 ministry (*pulhana*; *tešmešta*): 1.1, 5,
 12–13, 20, 29, 45, 52, 59, 61; K1.32,

- 36–37, 57, 79; K2.44, 55, 92, 94;
K3.36–38; K4.23, 25–26, 31, 57
- mirror: 1.43; K1.91; K4.62, 80
- mode of life, conduct (*dubbara*): 1.6, 9–
10, 24, 43, 62; 2.4, 6; K1.28, 36–37,
68, 83; K2.11, 41, 49, 56, 64, 79, 81,
84, 103; K3.14, 46, 70, 77–78, 92;
K4.12–13, 15–16, 23–25, 44, 47–48,
62, 64–65, 72, 75, 89, 92–93
- Morning Star: K3.87
- Moses: 1.61
- mother: 1.40
- mystery, mysteries (*raza, raze*) sing.:
1.72; K1.27, 68, 90; K2.72, 76, 83,
103; K3.6, 18, 40, 49, 56, 73, 78,
100; K4.17, 78, 83–84, 89, 93, 95
plur.: 1.3; K1 (title) 2, 36–7, 68, 84, 86,
88; K2.14 44 (Eucharistic), 56–57,
60, 71, 77, 92; K3.47, 56–57, 60, 64,
90–91; 4.2, 10, 13–14, 16, 75, 78,
86–87, 89
- names of God: K3.1, 3, 6; K4.3–6
- neglect, negligence (*mahmyanuta*): 1.1,
42, 55, 61; K1.63; K2.28, 74, 80–81,
84; K3.11, 14, 36, 57; K4.23–24,
31, 89
- New Life (Rom. 6:4 Peshitta): 1.72, 85;
K1.87; K3.63
- New Man: K1.90
- New World (see under “world”)
- Office (liturgical; *tešmešta*): 1.12, 37, 76;
K1.58, 65–66; K2.43–44, 55, 58, 76,
79–80, 84–85, 87, 92, 95; K3.38;
K4.22–25, 27, 44–46, 57, 61, 63,
68–70, 93–94
- Old Man: K1.79, 85, 88; 2.79
- Palladius: K3.86
- Paradise, Book of: K3.86
- Passion: 1.37; K1.91; K4.82
- passion(s) (*hašša*): 1.22, 45–46, 49,
94; K1.31, 33, 58, 60, 67, 70–73,
83, 99–100; K2.80 (anger), 21
(fornication), 22, 24, 25
(fornication), 28, 34, 37–39, 79, 81,
98; K3.41, 52, 63–66, 91; K4.2, 12,
27, 29, 46, 54, 56, 58–59, 61–62, 85
(anger), 86–87, 99
- passionless: K3.51; dispassion: K4.34;
(see also “impassibility”).
- Paul: 1.17; K1.4, 38, 59, 82; 2.59; K3.74;
K4.18, 89
- perception, apperception: 1.71–72, 77,
82–83; K1.5, 36, 52, 78, 88, 97;
K2.26, 74; K3.14, 16, 39, 49, 51, 57,
60, 64, 96–97; K4.11, 44, 47–48
- perfection: 1.20, 62; K1.20–21, 23, 67;
K2.21, 75, 81; K3.48–49; K4.7–9,
34, 72
- perseverance: 1.10, 17; K2.44, 58, 79;
K4.23, 70
- Peter: K3.60
- pledge (*rahbona*): 2.6; K1.44; K4.65, 95
- praise: 1.75, 85–86; 2.1–2; K1.74–75, 80;
K2.7–8, 19, 25, 55, 63, 80; K3.17–18,
24; K4.72, 78, 86, 99–100
- prayer: 1.20, 28, 31–32, 35, 37, 55–56, 65,
73–79, 94–96; K1.21–22, 30, 34,
37, 42, 58–59, 63, 65, 67, 73, 80,
91, 96–100; K2.2, 13–15, 21, 28, 39,
44–45, 50–51, 55, 58–60, 76, 80–81,
84, 88, 92, 97; K3.11–14, 16, 18–20,
37–38, 41–46, 50, 84–85; K4.12,
25, 27, 32, 34–35, 38, 44, 46–49, 57,
62–70, 72–75, 91, 93–94, 99
- pure prayer: 1.32, 75; K1.67, 97; K3.11,
14, 41–43; K4.35, 63–66; purity of
prayer K1.73; K3.44, 46; K4.32,
72–73
- texts of: 1.71–72, 80–93; K1.34, 65,
81, 84, 86, 88, 90; K2.8, 30, 58, 81,
92; K3.72
- pride, good: K4.99; bad: 1.69; K1.25, 71;
K2.20, 25, 44, 48, 93, 95; K3.86, 89;
K4.23, 27, 31
- priesthood of Christ: K1.21–22; of
intellect: K4.60–61
- Promised Land: K3.64

providence (see also 'dispensation'):

K4.21, 26, 39, 89

psalms, psalmody: K1.20, 54–55, 59, 63;

K2.14, 55–56, 60, 80; K3.86; K4.31, 44–46

Ptolemaeus: K3.86

punishment: 1.3–4; K1.50, 77; K2.24, 48;

K3.94; K4.38–39

purity (*dakyuta*, *šapyuta*): 1.9, 49,

52–53, 76; K1.32, 73; K2.14, 57, 60;

K3.44–48, 51, 58, 63–64, 85, 91,

100; K4.1–2, 7, 9, 15, 31–33, 42, 49,

52, 54, 56, 59, 61, 72–74

reading (*qeryana*): 1.12, 31, 45, 58, 63,

66–67, 80; K2.13–14, 77, 87; K3.37;

K4.25, 27, 44–45, 57, 61, 63, 93

reflection (*herga*, *renya*): 1.43 44 (on

God), 55, 96; K1.100; K2.28, 35–36;

K4.15, 62

remembrance, recollection ('*uhdana*):

1.36–37, 39, 43, 50–52, 60, 63, 76;

K2.13, 24, 39, 45, 60, 78, 84; K3.10,

13, 16, 20, 26, 42, 48, 51, 70; K4.34,

42, 48–9, 74; of God: 1.36, 41, 55,

75, 86; K2.55; K4.100

renewal (*huddata*): K1.88, 90; K2.19, 79;

K3.82; K4.46, 54, 59, 78

repayment, retribution (*pur'ana*):

K2.82; K3.70, 93; K4.38

repentance (*tyabuta*): K1.20, 53, 76–77,

80–81; K2.46, 81, 101; K3.16; K4.1,

31, 43–45, 65–66, 93

resurrection (*nuḥḥama*, *qyamta*): 1.20,

43, 85–86, (87), 91; K1.65, 68, 87;

K2.65, 103; K3.6, 73, 77–78; K4.14

revelation(s) (*gelyana*): 1.23, 46, 52,

81–82, 85, 90; K1.17, 37, 80; K2.14,

44, 50, 59–60, 69, 71–73, 75–77;

K3.14, 41, 48–49, 55–60, 72, 84, 86,

91–92; K4.1, 10, 14, 17, 31, 48, 63,

78, 85, 88–89

rule (*qanona*): 1.30, 33, 36; K2.81;

K3.87–89; 4.24–25, 65, 74

sacrifice, sacrificial victim: 1.37; K1.21,

77, 93–95; K3.16; K4.22–23, 99

Samuel: K3.60

Satan: 1.23; K2.28–29, 47; K3.19, 25, 86

(88–89); K4.20, 22, 31, 89

Scripture(s): 1.2, 31, 62; K1.30, 41, 50,

67; K2.45, 50, 67, 84; K3.35, 56,

99; K4.3, 12, 45, 78, 85, 87, 89–90,

93, 95

sea, ocean: 1.8, 55; K3.72; K4.41

self-emptying (*msarrquta*): 1.62; K4.75

senses (*regše*): 1.20 23, 32, 37, 49, 85;

K1.22, 28, 37, 42, 56, 61, 71, 84, 89;

K2.6, 13, 19, 21, 44, 59–60; K3.5, 10,

15, 25, 32, 34, 58–60, 78, 86, 91–92;

K4.3, 17, 35, 39, 44, 47–48, 52, 77

Seraphim: K1.34; K2.30; K3.24

Sheol: 1.85–86; K1.34

ship: 1.8, 67; K2.15, 96; K4.44, 48

ship's captain: 1.8

silence (*šetqa*): 1.32, 37, 60, 81; K1.2, 15,

47, 89; K2.21, 42, 78; K3.74, 92;

K4.32, 34–5, 48, 66, 69, 76, 78

sin: 1.60–61, 82; K1.21, 50, 79, 85, 88;

K2.22, 29, 38–39, 48, 54, 76, 98;

K3.2, 16, 63, 65, 67, 94; K4.14, 31,

36–37, 43, 45, 74–75, 78, 84–85, 87,

89, 99

sinner: 1.69–70; K1.50; K1.50; K4.74–75,

78, 87

sinfulness: K2.12; K4.89

sleep: 1.37, 78, 95; K1.87; K2.44, 80, 86,

92; K3.59, 75; K4.61

solitary (*iḥidaya*): 1.3, 63; K1(title) 58, 67,

73, 100; K2.39–40, 43–44, 57, 59,

62, 64, 85, 92, 94; K3.26, 35, 60–61,

86; K4.15, 23–25, 31, 50, 58, 63, 72,

74, 92, 95

solitary life: 1.19, 46; K1.8, 35, 45–46;

K2.8, 44–45, 56, 92; K3.34; K4.23,

52, 72, 75, 92

solitude: 1.10; K2.31, 44; K4.53, 55, 93

solitary abode: K1.46

soul: 1.7 (eye of), 8, 18, 23–24, 52, 60,

65, 77, 95; 2.1–2, 6; K1(title) 12, 20,

- 22, 33-34, 36-37, 39, 52, 55, 58-59, 70-71, 73, 79, 85, 87, 93-94; K2.12, 15-16, 19-20, 22-23, 25-28, 35, 38-39, 45, 50, 54-55, 59-61, 76-80, 85, 88, 98-99, 101; K3.12-13, 16-17, 20, 24, 30-34, 37, 41, 45-46, 48, 52, 54, 58, 60-61, 63, 66, 73, 76-77, 86, 90-92; K4.13, 15, 27, 32, 47, 52, 54-57, 61-62, 64-65, 72, 76-77, 91, 93
- stillness (quietude, *hēsychia*; *shelya*): 1.5, 20 (of body), 52, 66, 75-76; K1.29, 36, 44, 58, 65, 70, 78-80; K2.11, 14, 43-44, 50, 56, 84, 93-94; 97; K3.34, 38, 61, 86; K4.14, 23, 25, 27, 41-43, 46, 49, 51-52, 54-55, 59, 62, 65, 71-72, 74-75, 77, 92-95
- stirring (*zaw'a*): 1.25, 55-56, 75, 79, 81, 85, 94, 96; K1.4-5, 7, 23, 25-27, 31-32, 36, 46, 58, 63-64, 80, 84-87, 90, 95, 99; K2.1, 20, 30, 45, 47, 49, 52, 58-60, 73, 76-77, 82, 87, 89, 91, 94, 103; K3.11, 13-14, 24, 29-30, 41-42, 46-49, 51, 55-56, 60-61, 77, 83, 85, 90-92, 100; K4.7, 10-11, 14-15, 23, 31-32, 48, 50-51, 53, 61-62, 64-68, 77, 91, 96
- struggles: see battles
- summit, peak (*aqme*): K2.49, 75; K4.42, 44-47, 72, 92-93
- sweetness: 1.2; K1.31, 40; K2.27, 44, 78; K3.12, 30, 37, 61, 65, 67; K4.23, 31, 44, 48, 87
- tabernacle (verb; *aggen*): K4.25, 54, 77, 92-93
- taste, tasting (*ta'm(t)a*): 1.83; K1.65, 78, 80-81, 83; K2.10, 14, 38, 77; K3.27, 30, 37; K4.14, 18, 48, 61, 71, 75, 77-78, 94, 96
- tears (*dem'e*): 1.20, 43, 73; K1.53, 85; K2.97; K3.13-14, 37; K4.23, 31, 74
- temptation (*nesyona*): 1.18; K2.16, 23, 27, 62, 81; K3.89
- thoughts (*huššabe*): 1.1, 20, 23, 26, 37, 49 (control over), 50 (illumination of), 52, 63-64, 71, 85, 90; K1.19-20, 23, 27, 30-31, 54, 58, 61, 71, 87, 89; K2.8, 11, 17, 20-21, 28, 30, 34, 36, 41-42, 45, 56, 59-61, 73; K3.11, 14-15, 18-19, 25-27, 29, 31, 41-42, 44-45, 48, 51, 56, 60-61, 63-64, 66, 70, 90-92; K4.12, 14-16, 21, 23-25, 27, 31-32, 34-35, 39, 41, 44, 46-58, 62, 65, 91, 93, 96, 99
- throne, divine (*tronos*): K3.86
- titles, divine:
- First-Born: K1.49; K2.65-66; K3.21
 - Firstling: K4.99
 - First-fruits: K1.22; K2.19; K4.78, 100
 - Mediator: 2.19
 - Overseer: K2.1
 - Sower: K2.3
- tree: 2.6
- Trinity: K1.91; K3.48, 57, 100; K4.78
- Twelve Prophets: K3.59
- unite, union (*huyyada*): 1.22, 36, 43, 56, 87; K1.7, 49, 91; K2.59, 88, 105; K3.76; K4.31, 42
- vexations: K3.69; K4.29, 39, 51, 55, 96
- vigil (*šahra*): K1.24, 28, 55; K2.44, 50, 85, 96; K4.74
- vigilance, wakefulness (*iruta*): 1.76; K1.28; K2.55; K3.14; K4.43,
- virtue (*myattruta*): 1.18, 20, 61, 63; K1.20, 56, 58, 79, 98; K2.5, 21, 23, 29, 38, 43-44, 47; K3.7-8, 35, 37, 48, 52-54, 56, 66-67, 90, 95; K4.1, 15, 44 (see also "excellence")
- vision (*hzata*): 1.1, 50, 52, 71, 84, 92; K1.4, 9, 37-38, 52, 72, 80, 82; K2.10, 50, 63, 75, 80, 84; K3.9, 48, 52, 54, 57-60, 90-92; K4.12
- wariness, watchfulness (*zhiruta*): K1.23; K3.15, 22, 34, 51, 80; K4.39

way of life (*dubbara*): 1.1-3, 5-7, 10-11,
13, 45, 62, 69, 75; K1.5, 11-12, 20,
27-28; K2.44, 84, 97; K3.54; K4.42,
57, 60, 71-72, 84

way of God: 1.69; monastic way: 1.47

weakness (*mḥiluta*): 1.33, 58, 61, 66;
K1.15; K2.16, 39, 44, 47, 82, 93;
K3.34, 72; 4.89

will, divine: 1.3

wisdom, divine: 2.5; K2.73; K3.13, 20, 69,
81; human: 1.17, 22, 45, 50; K1.46,
48; K2.26, 28, 30, 44; K3.13, 20, 54;
K4.12, 21, 31, 40, 78

women: 1.63; K2.12, 97; K3.25-26

wonder (*temha*, *tehra*): 1.32, 43-44, 52,
56, 75; K1.31, 35-36, 45-46, 52, 67,
86, 88-89; K2.8, 10, 14, 44, 55, 60,
77-78, 88-89, 102; K3.12, 20, 25,
41, 49, 77-78; K4.12-14, 47-48, 63,
66, 78, 95

world: 1.2, 9, 16, 22, 37, 45-46, 50, 60, 63,
67-68, 74-75, 80-84; 2.4-5; K1.13,
20, 36, 58, 84, 86-7, 89; K2.11, 17,

30, 37-38, 44, 55; K3.6, 68-70, 78,
83; K4.15, 49, 51-55, 62-63, 71-72,
78-89, 94, 100

this world: 1.40, 43, 45, 62, 73, 75;

2.3-5; K1.9-10, 38, 68, 79, 87,

91-92; K2.12, 38, 59, 84; 3.9, 13-14,

20, 44, 46-47, 56, 71-72, 75; K4.14,

34, 74, 83, 88-89

next world: K2.65; K3.77

glorious world: K3.69; world of

glory: K3.83; world of Light: K3.83;

spiritual world: K1.13, 86; K3.6, 40,

56, 92; K4.3, 86

to come: K1.9, 62, 90-91; K2.24, 60;

K3.9, 46, 49, 56

New World: 1.37, 87; K1.13, 68, 79, 88;

K2.59; K3.49; K4.14, 17, 25, 83, 95

worship: 1.31, 38; K1.20; K2.68; K4.78

Zacharias: K3.59

zeal (*tnana*), good: K2.61, 77

bad: 1.67, 69; K2.38, 4.78

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ISBN 978-0-88141-702-9



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